

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

FROM THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS
TO PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

3rd
Edition

Dr. John W. Maag

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BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

FROM THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS
TO PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Third Edition

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Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

***Behavior Management: From Theoretical
Implications to Practical Applications,
Third Edition***

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I would like to dedicate this book to all the students throughout the years who have taken courses from me in behavior management. They have constantly challenged me to make the information practical and relevant to real life. Without these students, there would be no book. I am indebted to them.

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Preface

Welcome to the wonderful world of behavior management. You are about to enter a realm about which few teachers have a solid working knowledge and many possess broad misconceptions. For instance, too many teachers think that behavior management consists of providing students with M&M's or stickers when they exhibit appropriate behaviors. Behavior management entails much more—analyzing behavior, deciding what to change, collecting information on the behaviors of concern, using schedules of reinforcement, and monitoring progress—not to mention the variety of techniques for promoting students' appropriate behaviors. Some teachers may not be competent in behavior management because it is much more than simply giving a reward to children for “being good” or punishing them for “being bad.” It should come as no surprise, therefore, that behavior management is probably one of the most misunderstood concepts in education today. It never ceases to amaze me that so many people can have such strong feelings concerning a topic about which they know so little yet when teachers are surveyed it is the topic on which they want more training.

What will become readily apparent to you is that behavior management is not easy—it is a time-consuming and difficult endeavor. Consequently, teachers need to ask themselves if students' inappropriate behavior is worth the time and effort required to develop and implement behavior management techniques. Sometimes the answer will be “no,” and that is okay—not every behavior requires intervention. However, students with challenging behaviors can benefit most from the techniques presented in this book.

The Focus of Behavior Management

Although it is often desirable to reduce disruptive behaviors, reduction is only one small part of a program for effectively managing students' challenging behaviors. The major goal of behavior management—the one that is emphasized in this book—involves increasing desirable student behaviors. To be effective behavior managers, teachers need specialized information and skills. Unfortunately, the needed information and skills are often inaccessible or unavailable to teachers. One of the main reasons I wrote this book was so that teachers at all career levels, ranging from teachers-in-training to seasoned veterans, can become better managers of student behavior. Acquiring these skills is essential because many more students than before are displaying an increasingly broad range of challenging behaviors in classrooms around the country.

Things to Keep in Mind

One of my major goals in writing this book was to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that it be “user-friendly.” This commitment has sometimes been a challenge. For example, it is important for any textbook on behavior management to include discussions of principles of behavior, techniques for recording behavior, and methods for graphing behavior (which appear in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, respectively). In many textbooks, this information comes across as highly technical. To combat this problem, I incorporated many real-life examples

and tried to keep the text as free of technical jargon as possible while preserving the theoretical and empirical foundations on which the book is based. That is one reason the subtitle is *From Theoretical Implications to Practical Applications*.

Unlike in other books on behavior management, you will find that the chapters containing specific interventions techniques (such as Chapters 8–14) go into considerable detail. I have included “how-to” lists, charts, graphs, and illustrations. My goal is for you to be able to implement the techniques successfully, rather than simply read a one- or two-page condensed description of them, as is typical of other behavior management books. Therefore, I hope you will keep this book handy and refer to it often during your teaching career. If you find this book helpful as you begin to teach, please tell a colleague about it. If you do not like it, please let me know why, and I will try to make it better.

As you read this book, always keep in mind that developing and implementing behavior management techniques are difficult! There are no quick fixes to students’ challenging behaviors. In addition, behavior management is no substitute for teaching. That is, behavior management does not teach students new behaviors; teachers do. Rather, behavior management techniques are helpful in getting students to use behaviors and skills they already know but are not currently exhibiting. To accomplish this goal, you must systematically analyze and modify the antecedents (events that occur before a behavior) and consequences (events that occur after a behavior) that surround behavior. You should always start by analyzing and modifying the antecedents. This places you in a better position to prevent future episodes of misbehavior from occurring. It is important to maintain a preventative mindset.

Although behavior management is not easy, there is a great payoff for taking the time and effort to learn and implement the techniques described in this book. You will run more effective classrooms with students who treat each other, and you, with respect and who complete their work in a timely fashion. Not coincidentally, learning and implementing these techniques represents one of the best ways to preserve your own sanity in those occasionally insane moments that occur in every classroom.

The Approach of This Book

This book focuses primarily on students’ observable behavior and the environmental factors that affect its expression—unlike many other books, which assume that behavior can be explained and manipulated through medical, pharmacological, or genetic treatments. Consequently, this book avoids labels that have little or no relevance to managing students’ behaviors. Regardless of the labels students receive, they still engage in behavior whose expression is shaped by the environment. One thing that will become clear is that developing and implementing behavior management interventions requires considerable attention to detail—in identifying behaviors of concern, recording their occurrence precisely, and following detailed intervention plans. Although this approach may seem rigid or overly structured, there is one key rule to follow as you develop behavior management interventions: take what students give you. In other words, do not be afraid to be flexible. Good behavior management interventions are constantly evolving to meet the ever-changing aspects of students’ behaviors.

To meet this challenge, this book is organized into 14 chapters. Chapter 1 presents an introduction to behavior management and the basic tenets of behavior modification and applied behavior analysis on which it is based. Chapter 2 describes impediments to managing behavior that can interfere with our ability to deal with students’ inappropriate behaviors. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the origins of behavior management by presenting various theories of human behavior. Chapter 4 focuses on the basic principles of behavior modification that form the foundation for all the subsequent interventions described in the book. Chapter 5

discusses the importance of targeting, counting, and recording behavior as it occurs in natural settings. Chapter 6 describes methods for taking the information collected from counting and recording behavior and graphing it to provide a visual representation of whether an intervention is working. Knowledge of the material presented in Chapters 5 and 6 is necessary to engage in one of the most important aspects of behavior management—conducting functional assessment—the focus of Chapter 7. Through functional assessment, we can analyze contextual and curricular variables and teach students replacement behaviors. Chapter 8 focuses on preventing behavior problems by describing techniques for making curricular modifications, applying effective instructional strategies, and making environmental accommodations. Chapter 9 describes techniques for increasing behavior, including token economies, behavioral contracts, group-oriented contingencies, and novel approaches. Chapter 10 examines ways to use differential reinforcement for decreasing behavior. By using the information presented in Chapters 9 and 10, we can eliminate about 95 percent of all behavior problems. The remaining 5 percent are usually modifiable using punishment—the focus of Chapter 11. Chapter 12 discusses how to teach students self-management—the ultimate goal of any behavior management intervention. Chapter 13 gives an overview of cognitive-behavior modification. These techniques center on the role our beliefs about, or interpretations of, events play in our emotional reactions and behavioral responses. Finally, Chapter 14 discusses how to promote generalization from the settings in which intervention took place to other settings.

New to This Edition

There are several new features to the third edition of this book. First, and most importantly, case studies have been added. Specifically, scenarios of two children—Shawna, a third-grader and Jose, a fifth grader—are followed across most of the chapters relating the information to developing effective interventions for these two children within a collaborative model. Second, examples of technology related to behavior management have been infused throughout most of the book and supported through Tech Support boxes. Third, there is a focus on school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) and response to intervention (RtI) as the mechanisms for implementing behavior management. Fourth, a section on cultural diversity and its relation to behavior management has been added to Chapter 2. Finally, MindTap for Education is a first-of-its kind digital solution with an integrated e-portfolio that prepares teachers by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and competencies they must demonstrate to earn an education degree and state licensure, and to begin a successful career. Through activities based on real-life teaching situations, MindTap elevates students' thinking by giving them experiences in applying concepts, practicing skills, and evaluating decisions, guiding them to become reflective educators.

Accompanying Teaching and Learning Resources

The third edition of *Behavior Management* offers many ancillary materials that can support and enhance the text experience and an instructor's presentation of the course.

Online Instructor's Manual with Test Bank

An online instructor's manual accompanies this book. It contains information to assist the instructor in designing the course, including sample syllabi, discussion questions, teaching and learning activities, field experiences, learning objectives, and additional online resources. For assessment support, the updated test bank includes true/false, multiple-choice, matching, short-answer, and essay questions for each chapter.

PowerPoint Lecture Slides

These vibrant Microsoft PowerPoint lecture slides for each chapter assist you with your lecture by providing concept coverage using images, figures, and tables directly from the textbook.

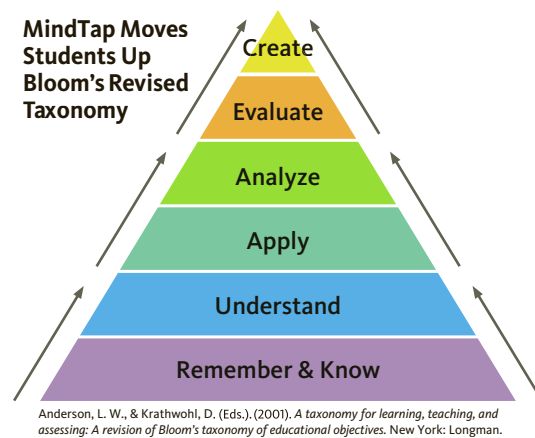
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MindTap™: The Personal Learning Experience

MindTap for *Behavior Management* represents a new approach to teaching and learning. A highly personalized, fully customizable learning platform with an integrated e-portfolio, MindTap helps students to elevate thinking by guiding them to:

- ▶ Know, remember, and understand concepts critical to becoming a great teacher
- ▶ Apply concepts, create curriculum and tools, and demonstrate performance and competency in key areas in the course, including national and state education standards
- ▶ Prepare artifacts for the portfolio and eventual state licensure, to launch a successful teaching career
- ▶ Develop the habits to become a reflective practitioner



As students move through each chapter's Learning Path, they engage in a scaffolded learning experience, designed to move them up Bloom's Taxonomy, from lower- to higher-order thinking skills. The Learning Path enables preservice students to develop these skills and gain confidence by:

- ▶ Engaging them with chapter topics and activating their prior knowledge by watching and answering questions about authentic videos of teachers teaching and children learning in real classrooms
- ▶ Checking their comprehension and understanding through Did You Get It? assessments, with varied question types that are autograded for instant feedback
- ▶ Applying concepts through mini-case scenarios—students analyze typical teaching and learning situations, and then create a reasoned response to the issue(s) presented in the scenario
- ▶ Reflecting about and justifying the choices they made within the teaching scenario problem

MindTap helps instructors facilitate better outcomes by evaluating how future teachers plan and teach lessons in ways that make content clear and help diverse students learn,

assessing the effectiveness of their teaching practice, and adjusting teaching as needed. MindTap enables instructors to facilitate better outcomes by:

- ▶ Making grades visible in real time through the Student Progress App so students and instructors always have access to current standings in the class
- ▶ Using the Outcome Library to embed national education standards and align them to student learning activities, and also allowing instructors to add their state's standards or any other desired outcome
- ▶ Allowing instructors to generate reports on students' performance with the click of a mouse against any standards or outcomes that are in their MindTap course
- ▶ Giving instructors the ability to assess students on state standards or other local outcomes by editing existing or creating their own MindTap activities, and then by aligning those activities to any state or other outcomes that the instructor has added to the MindTap Outcome Library

MindTap for *Behavior Management* helps instructors easily set their course since it integrates into the existing Learning Management System and saves instructors time by allowing them to fully customize any aspect of the learning path. Instructors can change the order of the student learning activities, hide activities they don't want for the course, and—most importantly—create custom assessments and add any standards, outcomes, or content they do want (e.g., YouTube videos, Google docs). Learn more at www.cengage.com/mindtap.

An Example for Thought

You are busily circulating around the room helping individual students who are working on their arithmetic assignment. You ignore the sounds of students talking and laughing behind you. Then Mike knocks several books to the floor getting out of his chair and saunters over, asking you for permission to go to the bathroom. When you deny his request, he sighs loudly and takes the long route back to his desk. As he swerves between the rows of desks, he kicks several students' feet, knocks the books off the desk of another student, and tweaks the ear of the boy sitting in front of him. Finally, he sits down and dramatically gets out his worksheet—only to break his pencil before completing the first problem. He then sits back, flipping his broken pencil in the air. When you ask him what he's doing, he replies, "Nothing." The other students in the class now have stopped working and are alternately staring at you and at Mike. You give him permission to sharpen his pencil.

The giggles begin and grow louder as Mike sharpens his pencil down to a stub. He then opens the compartment containing the pencil shavings, only to spill them on the floor. He apologizes insincerely as he bends down to clean up the mess, nonchalantly stepping on a classmate's foot. As he begins to stand, he purposely bumps his head on another student's desk. The entire class is now laughing.

Although Mike's antics are not severe, your class routine has been disrupted, and you are angry and frustrated. This scenario, and many like it, occurs daily in the lives of teachers. How do you handle Mike and others like him? *Read on and find out!*

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About the Author

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Dr. Maag has taught students with emotional and behavioral disorders and those along the autism spectrum. He is also a licensed psychotherapist and has worked with numerous families and children throughout the past 20 years. He is a nationally recognized behavioral consultant to agencies, school districts, and organizations on best practices for managing resistance and improving relationships with others. Dr. Maag is a frequent public speaker and consulting editor to several journals. He is also the co-founder of Alternative Communication Techniques (www.altcommtechniques.com), an organization that provides consultation to school districts and educational agencies to address the challenges of students who display problematic behaviors.

Introduction to Behavior Management

Chapter Overview

- 1-1 Behavior Modification
- 1-2 Defining Behavior
- 1-3 Three-Term Contingency
- 1-4 Important Terms
- 1-5 Applied Behavior Analysis
- 1-6 Behavior Management and Its Relation to Schools
- 1-7 Ethical Considerations in Behavior Management
- 1-8 Technology
- 1-9 Bringing It Together

Summary

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- 1-1 Describe the attributes and misconceptions about behavior modification.
- 1-2 Explain the difference between traits and objectively defined behavior, and between overt and covert behavior.
- 1-3 Recognize that functional relations exist between behavior and environmental variables (antecedents and consequences), and conduct an A-B-C analysis.
- 1-4 Define reinforcement, punishment, discipline, and consistence and explain the misconceptions surrounding these terms.
- 1-5 Define applied behavior analysis (ABA) and describe its attributes.
- 1-6 Understand how behavior management fits into school systems.
- 1-7 Understand the ethical issues in behavior management.
- 1-8 Understand how technology is being used in schools.
- 1-9 Understand that ABA techniques can be easily misapplied and should initially be practiced under the supervision of applied behavior analysts.

Behavior management is a familiar, albeit misunderstood, term that many teachers evoke when confronted with students displaying challenging behaviors. Like many often-heard terms, it triggers reactions that range from complete rejection to total acceptance of it as an educational change approach. Perhaps some of the strong attitudes people have toward behavior management stems from its reliance on principles of *behavior modification*—a term that conjures strong images. Therefore, this chapter begins with a discussion of behavior modification. Second, both overt and covert behaviors are defined and differentiated from subjective occurrences that people frequently mistake for behavior. Third, the three-term contingency is described as a way to better understand factors that prompt and maintain behaviors. Fourth, several terms important to behavior management are introduced and reconceptualized in ways different from those in which society traditionally views them. Fifth, the discipline of applied behavior analysis (ABA) is described as a model for integrating the techniques presented in much of this text. Finally, the role behavior management plays in school systems, is described.

1-1 Behavior Modification

The term *behavior modification* elicits strong negative reactions because it is incorrectly associated with coercion and bribery.

The term **behavior modification** usually elicits strong opinions from people. At one extreme it is viewed as the answer to all of society's ills; at the other it is seen as a coercive and manipulative tool no better than the brainwashing techniques that captors often inflict on prisoners of war. The reality is that behavior modification is neither. Instead, behavior modification in the classroom involves identifying maladaptive behaviors that interfere with learning and assisting students in developing more adaptive behaviors.

1-1a Attributes of Behavior Modification

Martin and Pear (2016) described four attributes of behavior modification that have been derived from scientific study. These attributes demonstrate that behavior can be systematically modified in a desired direction.

The most important attribute is that behavior can be precisely defined and measured. Measuring allows us to assign a number to behavior. The numbers can be placed on a graph before, during, and after implementing a particular behavior management intervention. The term **intervention** simply refers to any action taken to improve a student's behavior. Quantifying and graphing behavior in this fashion provides several useful pieces of information. First, it helps us determine whether the targeted behavior is severe enough to warrant intervention. Sometimes our perceptions of given behavior are different from the actual behavior. This discrepancy becomes apparent when we can see the behavior visually represented on a graph. Second, it enables us to determine whether the intervention was effective by comparing the counts of behavior before and after intervention. Third, seeing the results of measuring behavior makes us better teachers. Specifically, teachers who measure behavior make more frequent and appropriate decisions regarding the continuation, modification, or discontinuation of an intervention.

Second, behavioral principles form the basis for developing effective interventions. The work of B. F. Skinner, described in Chapter 3, has had the greatest impact on the development of effective interventions. These interventions are based on behavioral principles described in Chapter 4. Unfortunately, most teachers do not have a good working knowledge of principles of behavior. This ignorance often results in the misapplication of positive reinforcement techniques and overreliance on punishment—two principles that will be elaborated upon shortly.

Third, behavior modification is based on research. In fact, perhaps no other aspect of psychology and education has been as thoroughly investigated as have techniques of behavior modification. An unfortunate practice in which many educators engage is “jumping on the

Measuring, recording, and graphing behavior does not have to be a burdensome process, and it is appropriate for students who present the most challenging behaviors.

Although there are numerous theories regarding the nature of learning, the noted psychologist B. F. Skinner probably summed it up best by stating that “learning is not doing, it is changing what we do.”

bandwagon” of any new technique reported in the media. Techniques such as facilitative communication, modality testing and teaching, applied kinesiology, optometric vision training, and neural repatterning have a certain pseudoscientific appeal—and at one time they may have even been considered chic. These fads seem to come and go like the tides. However, they have not withstood the rigors of scientific scrutiny. In contrast, techniques of behavior modification have been empirically tested and found to be effective for modifying students’ behaviors.

Fourth, intervention techniques derived from the basic principles of behavior can be used to rearrange students’ environments to promote appropriate behavior. This results in students who are more self-sufficient, independently functioning members of society—one of the ultimate goals of education. The environment can be rearranged in a variety of ways to promote appropriate behavior. For example, a teacher can move a student closer to or farther away from certain classmates. The environment includes classroom variables such as the teacher’s and students’ behaviors, the physical arrangement, tasks to be completed, and materials used to deliver instruction.

Shea and Bauer (2011) condensed the attributes of behavior modification into four procedures in which teachers can engage in the classroom:

1. Observe and clarify the behavior to be changed.
2. Select and present potent reinforcers at the appropriate time.
3. Design and impose, with consistency, an intervention technique based on principles of reinforcement.
4. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. (p. 43)

The four procedures described by Shea and Bauer (2011) are discussed in detail in several chapters in this book.

1-1b Misconceptions About Behavior Modification

Although these procedures, as well as attributes of behavior modification, reflect a systematic method of helping students perform more socially desirable behaviors, the term *behavior modification* still has negative connotations. Some of the negative reactions stem from the meaning of the word *modification*, which brings to mind images of inhumane and coercive attempts to control or change peoples’ behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2012). The mistaken use of the term is one reason why this book is titled *Behavior Management*. Although the term *management* is not ideal—a point raised in the Preface—it nevertheless refers to the process of giving individuals direction, guidance, and training regarding their performance.

Another reason for public outcry is because behavior modification is often (and incorrectly) associated with procedures that cause pain or discomfort, such as the use of electroshock therapy or restraints to suppress aberrant behavior. Tragically, aversive procedures sometimes have been abused under the guise of behavior modification. For example, at an institution in Florida one of the mildest punishments involved washing residents’ mouths out with detergent when they spoke in what staff considered a verbally inappropriate fashion (Risley, 1975). This unfortunate situation only demonstrates that any technique can be misused by uncaring or ill-trained personnel.

Unfortunately, the bad press behavior modification often receives detracts from its societal value and myriad practical applications, as described by Martin and Pear (2016) and listed in Table 1.1. As this table clearly shows, behavior modification can be used to solve a number of societal problems. Yet it can also be used by unscrupulous persons for unworthy ends. However, because behavior modification is simply the planned, systematic application of methods for teaching everyday behaviors, its use cannot be prohibited. Few teachers deliberately cause their students to engage in inappropriate behaviors, yet this may be the unintended outcome when they do not systematically evaluate the consequences of their interactions with students. This problem can be avoided by teachers who learn about behavior modification in an intelligent and responsible manner. This process begins with an exploration of what behavior actually is.

TABLE 1.1 CONTRIBUTIONS OF BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

1. Improving education practices in every content area, from preschool to colleges and universities
2. Improving the behavior of individuals with developmental disabilities, autism, and schizophrenia
3. Treating clinical conditions such as anxiety, obsessions and compulsions, stress-related problems, depression, obesity, marital problems, sexual dysfunction, and personality disorders
4. Treating medical problems such as seizure disorders, chronic pain, addictive disorders, and sleep disorders
5. Establishing treatment compliance, promoting healthy living, dealing with aging and chronic illness, and managing caregivers
6. Decreasing littering in public campgrounds
7. Increasing the recycling of soft drink containers
8. Helping community boards solve problems
9. Promoting energy conservation by increasing bus ridership
10. Encouraging welfare recipients to attend self-help meetings
11. Helping college students live together in a cooperative housing environment
12. Improving productivity, decreasing tardiness and absenteeism, increasing sales volume, creating new business, improving worker safety, reducing theft by employees, and improving management—employee relations
13. Improving the skills of athletes, motivating athletes to practice and undergo endurance training, changing the behavior of coaches, and psyching up athletes for competition

1-2 Defining Behavior

Behavior simply refers to what individuals do—their observable actions. Behavior can be verbal or nonverbal. The use of language is an important aspect of verbal behavior, involving asking or answering a question, commenting on something, telling a joke, and so forth. Nonverbal behaviors are physical actions. Some nonverbal behaviors serve a communicative function, such as smiling, nodding one's head, or raising one's eyebrows in response to another person's gesture or comment. Other nonverbal behaviors entail more pronounced movements that serve functions other than communication, such as running, throwing a ball, or putting on shoes. Some activities, such as working on a crossword puzzle, require both verbal and nonverbal behavior (Sarafino, 1996). The key aspects of behavior are that it not only requires human action but also is performed as a way to interact with various elements of the environment. Consequently, being buffeted by a strong gust of wind is not an example of behavior, because both living and nonliving organisms respond similarly to high winds (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007).

1-2a Things That Are Not Behavior

It is common for teachers to mistakenly label behavior by what a student is not doing. For example, a teacher may state that the main problem a student displays is not following directions or not completing work. However, behavior is what we do, not what we don't do. Here is the question to ask teachers when they use these descriptions: "What specific behaviors is the student engaging in instead of following directions?" The answer may be that the student is talking to neighbors, walking around the room, or doodling instead of following the direction to write answers to math problems on page 56.

Another similar problem is when teachers describe behaviors based on the outcome they desire. For example, it is common for teachers to say they want students to complete more work. However, the word "completion" is not a behavior but rather describes a final product. Here is the question to ask a teacher in this situation: "What are the specific behaviors you

want to see the student do more of in order to result in a completed assignment?” The answer to that question most likely is that the teacher would like to see the student write more correct answers. However, the main problem teachers face is the tendency to explain students’ actions with subjective (versus objective) words or terms.

There are two interrelated additional terms that are attributed to behavior when, in fact, they are not: “on-task” and “off-task.” Teachers commonly describe wanting students to spend more time “on-task” and less time “off-task.” On-task and off-task are not behaviors but rather describe one’s status, position, or standing. A person’s status could be driving a car, sitting in a movie theater, or flying on an airplane. It does not describe the specific behaviors engaged in, such as changing a radio station in the car, whispering to a friend at the movie theater, or walking to the restroom on an airplane. The question to ask teachers when using terms such as “on-task” and “off-task” is the same as previously given: “What are the specific behaviors you’d like to see the student perform to indicate he was on-task?” or “What are the specific behaviors the student is currently engaging in that indicate he’s ‘off-task?’”

1-2b Problems Subjective Terms Present

In a nutshell, **subjective** terms used to describe behavior have different meanings to different people. They are biased, skewed, and global traits. For example, teachers may label students’ behaviors as “lazy,” “honest,” “friendly,” “hard-working,” “angry,” “shy,” and “inattentive.” The basic problem in using words like these to describe behaviors is typified in the age-old saying “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Perceptions of reality are based on individuals’ past experiences, which necessarily differ from person to person. For example, a common behavior for many elementary-age boys is to hit each other on the arm. One teacher may call this student “friendly” and another may call him “mean.” Inevitably, the same student’s behavior can appear both appropriate and inappropriate depending on the characteristics of the observer doing the labeling.

There are several other problems with using subjective words to describe behavior. First, the use of such terms shifts the focus from the student’s behavior to the student herself. If we use a term like “lazy” to describe a student’s behavior, we are not really talking about her actions. Instead, we are using our subjective judgment to attribute a reason for her behaving in a certain way. For example, a student may be wandering around the room and talking to peers instead of doing her assignment of 10 math problems on a worksheet. The teacher may regard the student’s behavior—her laziness—as the result of some personality trait. What does the student do? She fails to finish 10 math problems on a worksheet. Why? Because she is lazy. What is she? She is lazy. However, we do not know whether laziness is the real reason for the unfinished work or whether, for example, the student wants to avoid an assignment that she believes she cannot complete correctly.

The second problem with using subjective terms such as “lazy” is that a teacher may set in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the student comes to believe she is lazy and acts accordingly. The teacher who labeled her may then say, “I told you so.” The solution is to use more objective terms to describe the specific behaviors desired of the student and to determine what purpose not completing the work may have served. For example, the teacher might alter the assignment so that it is congruent with the student’s skill level.

The third problem with describing behavior subjectively is that it hinders both teacher and student from detecting academic improvements. Describing a student as “lazy” does not help us to determine if the behavior of completing math problems is improving, staying the same, or getting worse. In contrast, saying that the student completed 4 out of 10 math problems permits us to set realistic goals for improvement. We can be confident that our efforts were successful if the student completes 7 problems on the subsequent assignment.

The fourth problem with describing behavior subjectively is that doing so may escalate a confrontation between teacher and student that could otherwise have been avoided. For example, a student may be told to stop being so “hostile” when he trips a classmate. Later, the student socks a peer in the arm in an age-appropriate expression of friendship. Nevertheless, the teacher views this new behavior as another example of being “hostile” and reprimands the student. The student, in turn, may think this admonishment is unfair because, to his way of thinking, he was being friendly, not hostile. A power struggle may ensue (Maag, 2001a).

These problems can be avoided by describing students’ behaviors in objective terms—but this is not as easy as it sounds. Seasoned teachers have just as much difficulty being objective as do novices. This is because we all like to condense our speech to convey the most meaning with the least amount of words. Although this goal is noble, doing so makes it difficult to discuss students’ behaviors objectively. Table 1.2 provides some common examples of subjective descriptions of inappropriate and appropriate behaviors and their objective counterparts. Although it takes some time to begin thinking in objective terms when describing behavior, the benefits to both teachers and students are considerable. Namely, it permits us to identify and analyze the factors that trigger and maintain behaviors.

1-2c Considering Covert Behavior

Behavior typically focuses on overt actions—either verbal or nonverbal—that are observable to others. However, some experts have suggested that not all behaviors can be directly observed, that they are covert. Interpretations of a situation or event are based on beliefs, perceptions, and expectations stored in memory (Howell & Nolet, 2000). For example, some college students dislike giving presentations to their classmates. They may be worried that they may make a mistake and that their classmates will either laugh at them or become bored. These covert beliefs, or self-statements, can stimulate emotions such as anxiety or fear and physical sensations such as sweaty palms or rapid breathing and heart rate. These students may also exhibit overt behaviors such as nervous laughter, rigid body posture, and hand wringing, although these behaviors do not always accurately reflect their covert behaviors.

TABLE 1.2 SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE DESCRIPTORS OF INAPPROPRIATE AND APPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Inappropriate Behaviors

Subjective Description	Objective Description
Is lazy	Only writes answers to half the math problems on the worksheet
Uses bad language	Says “shut up” when asked to put books away
Is immature	Cries when doesn’t get to be first in line
Is manipulative	Asks Ms. Jones to listen to music after Mr. Smith says “no”
Acts oppositional	Has to be told three times to stop talking to classmate

Appropriate Behaviors

Subjective Description	Objective Description
Is polite	Says “thank you” after receiving a compliment
Acts friendly	Smiles when talking to others
Has good work habits	Sits up straight, keeps eyes on teacher, raises hand before talking
Gets along well with others	Asks students to play games at recess
Exercises self-control	Finishes work without being asked

The principles of behavior described in this chapter form the basis for many of the behavior change procedures described in this book.

Covert behaviors and self-statements are not extensively covered in this text, because they do not enjoy the empirical support that techniques based on the modification of overt behaviors have. Nevertheless, thoughts can influence the expression of behaviors, which is why a discussion of cognitive-behavior modification appears in Chapter 13. However, it is important to understand that the most effective way of managing students' challenging behaviors is by observing their overt expressions and differentiating them from subjective traits that teachers often incorrectly ascribe to behavior.

This book focuses on overt behavior because it can be observed objectively and its modification can be validated. Nevertheless, there is a growing body of literature focusing on the assessment and treatment of covert behavior. Consequently, Chapter 13 addresses the use of cognitive-behavior modification.

1-3 Three-Term Contingency

Behavior was previously defined as students' overt and observable actions. It does not occur in a random or unorganized fashion. Rather, students behave purposely, and their behaviors attain meaning as a function of the context—situation or circumstances—that exists in a particular environment (Maag, 1999). The **environment** is the universe of events and objects, both animate and inanimate, that are part of our surroundings (Johnston & Pennypacker, 2009). For example, a classroom environment is composed of animate objects, such as students and adults, and a host of inanimate objects, including (but not limited to) tables, chairs, chalkboards, materials, and tasks. The world is an orderly place in which each event happens in relation to other events. The relation between events is called a **contingency**. Contingencies are identified through the sequential relation between antecedents and consequences that prompt and maintain behaviors. This arrangement is depicted in Figure 1.1.

1-3a Antecedents

Antecedents are the circumstances that exist in the environment before a behavior is exhibited. Antecedents exist for all behaviors and serve as a cue or prompt for an individual to behave in a particular way. For example, a red traffic light is an antecedent that prompts the behavior of depressing the brake. Other examples of antecedents include a phone ringing as a cue to pick it up, a teacher asking a question as a cue to provide an answer, and someone smiling at another individual as a cue to smile back or say “hello.”

It is important to understand that antecedents do not *cause* behavior—they only serve as cues. For example, there is no inherent biological predisposition for us to depress the brake when encountering a red traffic light—it is a learned behavior. The red light cue cannot prevent us from choosing to accelerate. Antecedents not only cue behavior but also can elicit specific behaviors that help us avoid punishment or obtain reinforcement. Most of us stop at a red light to avoid the potential punishing consequences of receiving a ticket, getting into an accident, or injuring another person. Therefore, although our behavior may be cued by antecedents, it is ultimately controlled by consequences.



FIGURE 1.1

Three-Term Contingency

TABLE 1.3 TWO FUNCTIONS OF CONSEQUENCES

Antecedents	Behavior	Consequences
Teacher asks Nancy a question.	Nancy gives correct answer.	Teacher tells Nancy she gave a great answer (stimulus presented).
Billy calls Jimmy a jerk.	Jimmy hits Billy.	Billy stops calling Jimmy a jerk (stimulus terminated).

1-3b Consequences

Consequences affect future behavior by serving either to increase, decrease, or maintain it. There are two forms of consequences: (1) A new stimulus is presented or added to the environment or (2) an already-present stimulus is avoided, terminated, or removed from the environment. Both forms are illustrated in Table 1.3. In the first example, the teacher's question serves as a prompt or cue for Nancy to provide the answer. The verbal behavior of Nancy's giving the correct answer introduces a new stimulus into the environment—teacher praise. Assuming Nancy values teacher praise, that consequence will likely maintain or increase her behavior of answering questions. In the second example, Jimmy presumably finds it aversive for Billy to call him a jerk. This antecedent serves as a cue for Jimmy to hit Billy. Billy consequently stops calling Jimmy a jerk, and so an already-present stimulus is terminated.

1-3c A-B-C Analysis

As depicted in Figure 1.2, an **A-B-C analysis** involves writing down a sequence of events beginning with antecedents, followed by behavior, and terminating with consequences. Levitt and Rutherford (1978) offered three reasons to conduct an A-B-C analysis.

Antecedents	Behavior	Consequences
1. Teacher: "Time for math worksheets." Teacher begins handing out sheets.	2. Kevin gets up from his desk and walks around the room.	3. Sally giggles when Kevin pushes her elbow as she writes her name on the worksheet.
4. Teacher tells Kevin to sit down.	5. Kevin raises his hand.	6. Teacher: "I'll be right with you, Kevin."
7. Kevin turns around to talk to Bill.	8. Teacher tells Kevin to stop talking and get to work.	9. Kevin drops his worksheet on the floor.
10. Teacher is looking for a pencil at her desk.	11. Kevin gets up from his seat and heads for the pencil sharpener.	12. Teacher: "Where's your worksheet, Kevin?"
13. Kevin: "I'm not sure."	14. Teacher: "Check under your desk."	15. Kevin: "I'll copy the problems from Bill."
16. Teacher: "Pick up your worksheet or you'll stay in for recess."	17. Kevin walks over to the worksheet.	18. Teacher helps another student.
19. Kevin knocks Sally's book off her desk.	20. Teacher: "Kevin, pick up her book now."	21. Kevin smiles at Sally.

FIGURE 1.2

Example of an A-B-C Analysis

1. To get a general feel for the behavior of the student in order to help target the specific behavior to work on.
2. To determine, in a generally disruptive classroom, during a certain time of day, which students are the main disrupters.
3. To get a fix on some environmental cues to disruptive behavior: Is it occurring at a certain time each day? Is the teacher setting the students off by some cue?

In an A-B-C analysis, a piece of paper is turned sideways and divided into three columns labeled “Antecedents,” “Behavior,” and “Consequences,” as shown in Figure 1.2. Observations are then numbered and recorded according to whether they were seen as antecedents, behavior, or consequences. Alberto and Troutman (2012) recommended asking the following questions to assist us in making sense of the A-B-C analysis:

1. What are the behaviors that can be described as inappropriate? The behavior analyst should be able to justify labeling the behaviors inappropriate given the setting and the activity taking place.
2. Is this behavior occurring frequently, or has a unique occurrence been identified?
3. Can reinforcement or punishment of the behavior be identified? The reinforcement may be delivered by the teacher, parent, another child, or some naturally occurring environmental consequences.
4. Is there a pattern to these consequences?
5. Can antecedents to the behavior(s) be identified?
6. Is there a pattern that can be identified for certain events or stimuli (antecedents) that consistently precede the behavior’s occurrence?
7. Are there recurrent chains of certain antecedents, behaviors, and consequences?
8. Given the identified inappropriate behavior(s) of the student and the patterns of antecedents and consequences, what behavior really needs to be modified, and who is engaging in the behavior? (p. 208)

Based on the way we conduct A-B-C analyses, it may seem that the relation between antecedents, behavior, and consequences is linear. However, this is not the case. Instead, the relations between antecedents, behavior, and consequences are reciprocal (Gable, Hendrickson, Warren, Evans, & Evans, 1988). At the simplest level, reciprocity means that the consequences of a given behavior can become the antecedents for a succeeding behavior. As an illustration, apply an A-B-C analysis to the following exchange between teacher and student.

Teacher: “Nancy, what is the capitol of the United States?”

Nancy: “Washington, DC.”

Teacher: “Nice answer, Nancy.”

Nancy: “Thank you, Ms. Anderson.”

Teacher: “You’re welcome, Nancy.”

In this illustration, the first three exchanges should be obvious. The teacher’s question is the antecedent for Nancy’s verbal behavior of saying “Washington, DC.” The consequence is the teacher’s saying “Nice answer.” However, this consequence then becomes the antecedent for Nancy saying “Thank you,” which is the next behavior in the sequence. And so it can go indefinitely.

The key task in conducting an A-B-C analysis is to identify patterns. It is less relevant whether a given response is viewed as an antecedent or consequence. For example, in Figure 1.2, it is not particularly important to determine whether Sally’s giggling is reinforcing Kevin’s out-of-seat behavior (no. 3) or serving as an antecedent for the teacher’s telling Kevin to sit down (no. 4). Rather, the crucial insight to be obtained from the A-B-C analysis is that Kevin’s behavior is being reinforced through attention from both Sally and the teacher.