**Dogs, Pigeons, and Texts**

**Subject area**: Social Sciences, Introduction to Psychology

**Grade level/band:** 11–12

**STUDENT PROMPT SECTION**

1. **Task context**:

Imagine that you are hanging out in your living room, studying for an exam with some friends. You’re pretty comfortable: You’ve got your favorite caffeinated beverage and some snacks, and you’re listening to your favorite music. Your friend is busily working away nearby. Everything seems to be going fine until one of your friend’s cell phones distracts you. You had already silenced your phone so that you would be able to concentrate. (See? You were paying attention to the lecture about distraction as an impediment to learning!) However, your friend's phone periodically lets out the sound of a train whistle each time there is a new text message.

What you notice is that each time the whistle sounds, your friend picks up the phone without even thinking about it. In fact, your friend doesn’t even have to look; he just reaches out and picks up the phone while reading or grabbing a handful of chips with the other hand. Because you are now a psychology student and, therefore, a keen observer of behavior, you notice that your friend unlocks the smartphone, reads the text message, reacts with a smile, smirk, or confused look, and then finally types a reply. Over the next half hour, you notice that your friend seems to become happier with each text message. (You speculate that your friend is finalizing plans for going out later this evening. Clearly, that has to be it.)

You look down at the pages you are studying and notice that they are about classical and operant conditioning. (You smile to yourself when you think of Skinner’s pigeons, and then you wonder if you could run experiments on your own pet… but you digress.) You are curious whether your friend’s text messaging behavior has been conditioned via classical or operant means.

You share your observations with your friend, who says with certainty that it’s classical conditioning. You start to argue that operant conditioning could explain the text messaging behavior as well. By this time, you’ve both decided that you are going to be psychology majors, so you agree to conduct a study that could affirm whether classical or operant conditioning best explains the text messaging behavior. You declare that the study should be an experimental design, while your friend argues that all you need is a correlational study. Now you’ve had it! You decide to take the matter into your own hands and design your own study. You agree to share the results with your introductory psychology class once your study is complete.

Before you start, you need to do some research on classical and operant conditioning. Your instructor sends you to the resource *Forty Studies that Changed Psychology* and recommends that you read the following three learning studies:

* “It’s Not Just about Salivating Dogs,”
* “Emotional Little Albert,” and
* “Knock Wood.”

1. **The task**:

After reading the three classic learning studies found in the book *Forty Studies That Changed Psychology*, write a 2- to 3-page paper that describes the experimental study you have designed to test your hypothesis that either operant or classical conditioning explains text messaging behavior. The study that you design should focus on either classical conditioning **or** operant conditioning as a cause of text messaging behavior. You are designing a hypothetical study, so the sky is the limit. Imagine that you have limitless funds and resources to conduct your experiment. Write your paper for somebody who isn’t classically trained in psychology.

In your paper, you should:

* Clearly define the difference between operant and classical conditioning and state the hypothesis of your study.
* Identify all aspects of your experiment, including variables, your methods for assigning people to different groups, and any possible confounds or extraneous variables that could sway the results of your study.
* Consider your audience. Remember that you are writing for someone who hasn’t read research on these theories. Define your terms clearly.
* Cite your sources correctly in the text of your paper and create a Works Cited page using APA format or another style that your instructor selects.

1. **Materials/resources:**

* Access to *Forty Studies That Changed Psychology* by Roger R. Hock.
* Word-processing software to type and submit your paper.
* The 6th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, or you can access Purdue’s Online Writing Lab (owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/) for assistance with APA-style citations and references to the texts that you incorporate into your paper.

1. **Time requirements**:

You will have approximately two weeks to complete this assignment, but your instructor will provide specific due dates and guidelines. This assignment will be completed mostly out of class. However, your instructor may choose to set aside some class time for a variety of purposes, such as answering specific questions about the readings or about research designs.