



DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COURSE OUTLINE – FALL 2026

PY3810 (A2): Learning and Behaviour – 3 (3-0-0) 45 Hours for 15 Weeks

Northwestern Polytechnic acknowledges that our campuses are located on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral and present-day home to many diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Duncan's First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, who are the original caretakers of this land.

We acknowledge the history of this land, and we are thankful for the opportunity to walk together in friendship, where we will encourage and promote positive change for present and future generations.

INSTRUCTOR:	Dr. Renée Matte (she/her/elle)	PHONE: (780) 539 2994
OFFICE:	C403	E-MAIL: RMatte@nwpolytech.ca
OFFICE HOURS:	By appointment	

CALENDAR DESCRIPTION: This course is an introduction to the psychological theories of learning. Topics discussed will include the evolutionary context in which learning occurs, reflexes and fixed action patterns, sociobiology, the behaviourist theories of classical and operant conditioning, criticisms of the behavioural perspective, and criticism of the transitional memory theories. This course is the first of a pair of courses in the field and is generally followed by the advanced course in cognition, PY3580.

DELIVERY MODE: In-Person (On-Campus)

PREREQUISITE(S): Complete the following:
PY 1040 – Basic Psychological Processes (3) and
PY 1050 – Social and Individual Behaviour (3)
Or Permission of the instructor

REQUIRED TEXT: None. This course will use an open textbook. Relevant readings will be posted on the course myClass page.

Possible questions the course could answer for you include:

Can anything be
learned or are
there limits and
boundaries?

What processes
help us shape
and modify
behaviour?

Why are some
things easier to
learn and do
than others?

How are we able
to remember
some lessons but
not others?

LEARNING OUTCOMES: By the end of this course, you should (among other things) be able to:

Demonstrate fundamental knowledge and comprehension of the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, significant principles, and empirical findings in the areas of learning, behaviour, and cognitive psychology.

Discuss how principles in the areas of learning and behaviour enable the understanding of psychological phenomena in our everyday experiences.

Become familiar with key questions and studies in the fields of learning and behaviour. Know how to describe the key characteristics that distinguish the various theories and empirical research discussed.

Learn something new about (a) yourself and (b) the psychology of learning and behaviour. [Hopefully want to] remember and apply key concepts and content from this course beyond the semester.

Ultimately, this course is designed for you to retain and apply as much of the information about theories and concepts pertaining to the psychology of learning and behaviour as possible. However, this is only possible if you come ready to engage with the material and the ideas presented in class.

COURSE OUTCOMES: This course may be different from other courses you have taken. The focus will be on learning the material so that you can organize, understand it, then apply it to your own life and then reflect on your engagement with the concepts. Rather than relying on memorizing information, understanding and learning will be demonstrated through your abilities to clearly and deeply communicate your knowledge of course material.

TRANSFERABILITY: Please consult the Alberta Transfer Guide for more information. You may check to ensure the transferability of this course at Alberta Transfer Guide at: <https://transferalberta.alberta.ca/transfer-alberta-search/#/searchTypeStep>

**** For courses with alpha (letter) grading, a grade of D or D+ may not be acceptable for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. Students are cautioned that it is their responsibility to contact the receiving institutions to ensure transferability.**

GRADING CRITERIA:

Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines		Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines
A+	4.0	95-100		C+	2.3	66-69
A	4.0	90-94		C	2.0	63-65
A-	3.7	85-89		C-	1.7	60-62
B+	3.3	80-84		D+	1.3	55-59
B	3.0	75-79		D	1.0	50-54
B-	2.7	70-74		F	0.0	00-49

Note: *This grading criterion is specific to this course and differs from the general criteria.

EVALUATION OPTIONS:

OPTION A		OPTION B		OPTION C	
Assignment A1	35%	Assignment B1	35%	Assignment A1 or B1	35%
Assignment A2	35%	Assignment B2	35%	Assignment A2 or B2	35%
Reflections	10%	Activities	10%	Reflections/Activities	10%
Take-home final exam	20%	Take-home final exam	20%	Take-home final exam	20%

EVALUATION OPTIONS EXPLAINED:

OPTION A
Assignment A1 (October 20)
Is there something you've always wanted to learn? Now is your opportunity! With this assignment you will select a skill or ability (artistic, athletic, creative, linguistic, practical, etc.) and create a plan so that you can learn it. You will track your progress and reflect on the process of learning throughout. More details and an evaluation guide can be found on the course myClass page.
Assignment A2 (December 3)
In this assignment, you will be tasked with teaching someone else a skill or ability that they would like to learn (and that you can teach them). You will prepare a plan, apply psychological principles, evaluate your students' progress, and reflect on the teaching/learning process. Grading criteria and additional assignment details will be available on the course myClass page.
Reflections (Throughout)
Throughout the course you will be presented with a variety of reflection questions to consider. Your write-ups should be a brief (1 page, single-spaced) exploration of your personal thoughts, opinions, key takeaways, or connections with the material. Each reflection is worth 2% (total of 5 for the semester) and can be submitted at any point until the last day of classes. Maximum of 1 reflection per chapter.
Final examination (TBD)
The take-home exam will be emailed to students and will be due on the same day as the course's in-person final examination (date TBD). The final exam will be open book, however, neither collaborative work nor consultation of the internet is permitted . The exam will be cumulative and will feature short-answer and long-answer questions. More details will be discussed closer to the exam date.

OPTION B
Assignment B1 (October 20)
Is there a behaviour you have always wanted to change? Now is your opportunity! With this assignment you will select a behaviour/habit that you would like to modify, reduce, or extinguish. You will track your baseline, create a behaviour modification plan, and then execute your plan. More details and an evaluation guide can be found on the course myClass page.
Assignment B2 (December 3)
In this assignment you will be tasked with modifying someone else's behaviour. You will select a willing participant, track their behaviour, create a behaviour modification plan, and then help them execute this plan. Grading criteria and additional assignment details will be available on the course myClass page.
Activities (Throughout)
Throughout the course you will be presented with a variety of in-class activities in which you can participate. Your write-ups of various activities should be a brief (half a page, single-spaced) summary of the activity itself and what you learned from completing it. Each activity write-up is worth 1% (total of 10 throughout semester) and can be submitted at any point until the last day of classes. Maximum of 1 activity write-up per lecture.
Final examination (TBD)
The take-home exam will be emailed to students and will be due on the same day as the course's in-person final examination (date TBD). The final exam will be open book, however, neither collaborative work nor consultation of the internet is permitted . The exam will be cumulative and will feature short-answer and long-answer questions. More details will be discussed closer to the exam date.

OPTION C
Assignment A1 or B1 (October 20)
Choose whether you would like to complete Assignment 1 from Option A or Option B
Assignment A2 or B2 (December 3)
Choose whether you would like to complete Assignment 2 from Option A or Option B
Reflections or Activities (Throughout)
Choose whether you would like to complete 5 reflection questions throughout the semester or 5 of the in-class activities.
Final examination (TBD)
The take-home exam will be emailed to students and will be due on the same day as the course's in-person final examination (date TBD). The final exam will be open book, however, neither collaborative work nor consultation of the internet is permitted . The exam will be cumulative and will feature short-answer and long-answer questions. More details will be discussed closer to the exam date.

*Note: Please inform the instructor of your choice by Friday, September 18.

A form is available on our course myClass page. Once completed the form can be emailed to the instructor: RMatte@nwpolytech.ca

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

Week	Topic	Reading
Sept. 3	Course Overview	Syllabus
Sept. 8 & 10	Introduction to Learning & Behaviour	Chapter 1
Sept. 15 & 17	Behaviour Basics and Behaviour Learning	Chapter 2
Sept. 22 & 24	Classical Conditioning Basics	Chapter 3
Sept 29 & Oct. 1	Classical Conditioning Theories & Research	Chapter 4
Oct. 6 & 8	Operant Conditioning	Chapter 6
Oct. 13 & 15	Reinforcement and Choice	Chapter 6 (2)
Oct. 20	Assignment 1 (Option A, B, & C)	N/A
Oct. 22	Stimulus Control	Chapter 8
Oct. 27 & 29	Extinction of Conditioned Behaviour	Chapter 9
Nov. 3 & 5	Avoidance & Punishment	Chapter 7
November 9 – 13: Fall Break, No Classes		
Nov. 17 & 19	Observational Learning	Chapter 11
Nov. 24 & 26	Complementary Cognitive Processes	Chapter 10
Dec. 1	Complementary Cognitive Processes	Chapter 12
Dec. 3	Assignment 2 (Option A, B, & C)	N/A
Dec. 8	Review	N/A
Take-Home Final Exam (Cumulative) To be Scheduled by the Registrar's Office - Dec. 13-19		

*Notes: The last day to withdraw is November 27.

If you are aware of scheduling conflicts between any of the dates and your other commitments, make accommodations with the instructor as soon as possible.

If you find that you are having trouble completing the course requirements for any reason, please contact the instructor.

Do not wait until the end of the semester to ask for help, as by then it will then be too late.

COURSE POLICIES

CLASS ATTENDANCE: Lectures will be conducted in person, but attendance and participation will not be tracked. It is your responsibility to stay up to date with the course content and to make arrangements if you have to miss a class.

- Note that the instructor is not responsible for sending you her notes if you miss a class, arrangements should be made with other students in the class.
- Note that some course material, as well as the chapter quizzes, and the reflection questions/activities will only be presented in class.

EXTENSIONS AND MISSED EXAM: Extensions on the assignments will only be given with the instructor's advance permission. Opportunities to defer or postpone midterms or the final exam will require advance permission as well. Any extended absences should be supported by documented medical or compassionate reasons. If you find yourself unable to meet course requirements due to illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the instructor. If possible, this should be done in advance of the missed assignment, midterm, or exam. If this is not possible, then notification should be made as close to the due date and no longer than 3 days after.

GENERATIVE AI: NWP welcomes innovative and reliable uses of generative AI that respect human rights and democratic values. While the institution adopts technologies that support our operations, we understand that there are risks and limitations of generative AI and want to ensure responsible use.

It is essential to have human oversight when AI generates content, as AI results may include inaccuracies or biases from the data they were trained on. Generative AI outputs should not be assumed true, reliable, or ethical. They should not be used verbatim, treated as the sole source, or solely relied on for making final decisions.

In this course, students may use AI tools within specified boundaries. It is important to follow these guidelines to ensure responsible use and to avoid any academic misconduct. The following is a list of acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI in this course.

ACCEPTABLE USES OF AI include: to assist in gathering and organizing research materials for assignments; for improving grammar, spelling, and overall writing clarity; To translate text to aid in understanding for students who feel more comfortable with learning material in different languages.

UNACCEPTABLE USES OF AI include: to generate the main content of assignments or submitted written work; to complete assignments or the take-home exam; to write personal reflections, activity summaries, or opinion pieces.

AI REFERENCING: To ensure transparency and academic integrity, students must include an AI Reference List in any submitted work where AI was used.

This list should detail the following: the name of the AI tool used; the specific functions the AI tool assisted with; any relevant parameters or settings used; the exact prompts or queries used in the AI tool; a brief explanation of how the AI tool contributed to the assignment.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Northwestern Polytechnic ("NWP" or "the Polytechnic") believes that all students have certain rights that protect and support them through their education. Additionally, students are expected to take responsibility for their conduct during their period of study at NWP, including abiding by the rules, policies, and regulations of the Polytechnic.

Academic Misconduct will not be tolerated. For a more precise definition of academic misconduct and its consequences, refer to the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy available at: <https://www.nwpolytech.ca/leadership/policies/display?!D=69>

Other Academic and Administrative policies are available here:
<https://www.nwpolytech.ca/leadership/policies>

STUDENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Manage, schedule, and prioritize your learning! Be prepared to learn by regularly attending and being present in class, completing required readings, taking adequate notes, making arrangements for missed classes, and checking myClass regularly for deadlines and important announcements, updates, etc.
2. Contact Accessibility Supports (in the learning commons) to set up academic accommodations when required. More information is available at:
<https://libguides.nwpolytech.ca/learningcommons/AccessibilityServices>
 - a. Please note that when you contact an advisor, you will be asked to provide them with documentation supporting your request for accommodation.
 - b. You will be responsible for arranging your exam session with Accessibility Supports at the scheduled exam time.
3. Promptly communicate with the instructor if any problems arise that compromise your effective completion of the course.
4. Complete course requirements with honesty and integrity.
5. Prepare to learn with an open mind. Display a professional attitude and behaviour in the class. Be respectful of differing ideas. Use a non-judgmental stance when engaging with course material, yourself, other students, and the instructor.

INSTRUCTOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Provide a curriculum that exposes students to foundational, current, and topical issues in the areas of learning and behaviour psychology.
2. Create a safe, inclusive, open, and judgment-free environment where individuals feel comfortable being themselves and sharing or expressing their opinions and points of view.
3. Be prepared for lectures, class discussions, and student meetings and available to communicate about course content, evaluations, or course questions.
4. Provide details regarding how evaluations will be determined and prompt feedback on evaluative components of the course.
5. Respond to student emails promptly and provide information/support if problems arise.

STUDENT RESOURCES

- Seeking support sooner rather than later is often beneficial. There are many helpful resources available on campus for you to access, below is a list of some of those options.

Accessibility & accommodations	Student accessibility	https://libguides.nwpolytech.ca/learningcommons/AccessibilityServices
	Available supports	https://libguides.nwpolytech.ca/learningcommons/AccessibilityServices/supports
	Accessible study spaces	https://libguides.nwpolytech.ca/learningcommons/AccessibilityServices/studyspaces
Academic support	Academic advising	https://www.nwpolytech.ca/student-life/academic-advising
	Learning commons	https://www.nwpolytech.ca/student-life/learning-commons
	Read & Write program	https://libguides.nwpolytech.ca/learning_online/readandwrite
Technical support	Information Technology (IT)	https://www.nwpolytech.ca/departments/information-technology
	Financial services	https://www.nwpolytech.ca/financial-services
Personal wellness	NWP mental health services	https://www.nwpolytech.ca/mental-health-services
	Indigenous services	https://www.nwpolytech.ca/student-life/indigenous-services
	Alberta health services	https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/facility.aspx?id=1000583
	Community matters	https://www.nwpolytech.ca/community

- For a more comprehensive list of the services available to students on the Northwestern Polytechnic campus please visit <https://www.nwpolytech.ca/student-life>
- If you become concerned about (or would simply like to improve) your performance in this class at any point, please reach out to the course instructor as soon as you can.
- Finally, make sure you are prioritizing your own health and well-being throughout the semester and utilizing the supports at your disposal in a preventative manner when possible.