Applying Behaviorism and Gagne's Nine Events Lesson Plan Outline

Glen Buchanan. LDTC 600 9040, Learning Theories and Learner Analysis in Learning Design. May 26, 2026.

1. Subject Selection

Chosen subject. Setting up and using a password manager. This is the first hands on lesson in Digital Foundations, the first module of my Getting Ready to Work with AI pathway. The skill is procedural and easy to observe. The learner installs a password manager, creates one strong unique password, saves a real login, and signs in using autofill. That makes it a good fit for behaviorism, because the goal is a behavior I can prompt, reward, and check. I have taught this in cybersecurity workshops for years, so I know the content and I know where people get stuck.

2. Scenario Development

Learning scenario. The lesson is fully online and self-paced. The behavior I want is simple. When a learner sees a login or sign up screen, they reach for the password manager to create and save a strong unique password instead of reusing one from memory. The stimulus is the login screen and the "generate password" button inside the tool.

I use all four parts of operant conditioning to build and keep this behavior (Stangor & Walinga, 2014; Chin, 2011):

- **Positive reinforcement.** When the learner saves or creates a password, the strength meter turns green and a "saved" message appears. On the next login, autofill signs them in fast. These good results make the behavior more likely.
- **Negative reinforcement.** The "weak or reused password" warning goes away once the learner fixes it, and the stress of trying to remember passwords is gone. Removing those annoyances also strengthens the habit.
- **Positive punishment.** A reused or weak password gets a red warning that says it has shown up in known breaches. That mild bad result discourages the old habit.

- **Negative punishment.** Autofill does not work for accounts the learner never saved, so skipping the manager costs them the convenience they now like.

Because this is a chain of steps, I shape it in order. Save one password, then create a new one, then use autofill. I reward each step before adding the next. As learners start using the tool day to day, the rewards shift from constant (every action confirmed) to occasional (a fast, safe login now and then), which is what makes the habit stick.

3. Lesson Plan Outline: Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction

Gagne's events build on behaviorist stimulus and response ideas (McLeod, 2024), so they fit naturally on top of the scenario above (DeBell, 2019; Gagne et al., 2005). Each event below includes a short note on what it does.

- **Gain attention.** A short captioned clip plus a live "how long would it take to crack your password?" tool. The learner types in an example and watches the time jump from instant to centuries. This gives them a real reason to care before any teaching starts.
- **Inform learners of the objective.** State what they will be able to do by the end. Install a password manager, create and save one strong unique password, and sign in with autofill. A clear target lets the learner track their own progress.
- **Stimulate recall of prior learning.** Ask where their passwords live now. In their head, on a sticky note, in the browser, or the same one everywhere. Naming the old habit brings up the behavior the new one will replace.
- **Present the content.** A short captioned video with a written transcript shows how to install the tool and save a login. I use plain words first and the technical term second, like "a password manager is a locked notebook your apps can read." The content is split into three small parts that match the three steps.
- **Provide learning guidance.** A guided walkthrough has learners do each step on their own device, not on stock screenshots. I adjust to skill level instead of learning styles. A quick confidence check sends beginners to a slower path with an extra example, and sends experienced users to a clean up task on passwords they already saved.
- **Elicit performance (practice).** Learners install the tool, save three real logins, and create one new strong password, all on their own device. The activities are described here, not built.

- **Provide feedback.** Feedback is fast and mostly built into the tool. The strength meter, the saved message, and a working autofill all confirm success right away. An end of lesson check from me catches anything that did not work.
- **Assess performance.** The check is a task, not a quiz. Learners send a short checklist and a screenshot of a vault with three saved logins and one created password, and they show one successful autofill sign in. Mastery is the behavior done, not facts recalled.
- **Enhance retention and transfer.** The saved logins and the tool become part of the one page map of the learner's device, accounts, and data that carries into the later AI lessons. A follow up task asks them to do the same thing on their work and bank accounts that week, which moves the skill into daily life.

4. Reflection

Behaviorism shaped this lesson from the ground up. I picked one behavior I can see, found the signal that should trigger it, and set up fast rewards and mild consequences across all four parts of operant conditioning so the good habit grows and the old one fades (Skinner, 1953; Stangor & Walinga, 2014). Breaking the skill into small rewarded steps, then moving from constant to occasional rewards, is what should make the habit last. Gagne's nine events give that core a clear order and add the feedback and transfer steps that behaviorism leaves out (DeBell, 2019).

I also see where this approach stops. Behaviorism builds the behavior, but not the understanding behind it. A learner can finish every step without knowing why reusing passwords is risky. I handle that by adding a short reason with the action and a real account transfer task, and by saving the deeper why for later cognitivist lessons. Three real challenges stand out. First, in a self paced online course I cannot promise the rewards will fire the same way on every device, so I recommend one main tool with backup steps. Second, the strongest reward, autofill, lives in the tool and not in my course, so a broken setup can break the reward, and the end of lesson check is there to catch that. Third, rewards inside the tool may not carry over elsewhere, which is why the lesson ends with a task on real accounts. The goal is learners who do not just know about password managers but actually use one.

I used an AI tool (Claude) as a thinking partner to test the scenario and map the four parts of operant conditioning. I chose, edited, and checked all of it, and the design choices are mine. This follows the UMGC AI policy.

5. References

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