



6.1.1 | Apply: Exploring Assumptions about Learning

[Answer Key]

Below are the learning theories we thought aligned best to each of the statements of assumptions about learning. Note that scholars frequently disagree concerning the assumptions that form the basis of an instructional design, a pedagogical approach, or a theory. However, if you are familiar with the potential origins of the assumptions and with those assumptions that are shared by multiple theories, you will be better equipped to identify your own and others' theoretical orientations. This, in turn, will enable you to effectively dialogue with others concerning the design of an instructional project, and to surface your own potential biases about theory, instruction, learning, and pedagogy.

Assumptions about Learning	Which theory or theories align with this assumption?	Notes
a. Learning involves a change in behavior, and behavior can be shaped or taught.	Behaviorism	A Cognitivist might also agree with this assumption.
b. Students learn best by “doing” and by making mistakes.	Constructivism Behaviorism Cognitivism	
c. Studying similarities, differences, and examples helps turn data into meaningful information.	Cognitivism	This assumption originated with Cognitivists, but Behaviorists and Constructivists would likely agree.
d. Learning is the process of knowledge construction.	Constructivism	“Knowledge construction” is a constructivist buzz word, but a cognitivist might also agree.
e. Learning is the process of knowledge absorption.	Behaviorism Cognitivism	The idea of “taking in” or “absorbing” knowledge – actively or passively – would gain agreement from both Behaviorists and Cognitivists.
f. Knowledge is created and maintained through social interactions.	Constructivism	This assumption reflects social constructivist views.
g. Learning occurs when the bonds between environmental stimuli and correct responses are strengthened.	Behaviorism	This is a Behaviorist tenet. A Cognitivist would agree but would insist there are also other ways of learning.
h. For effective learning, responses must be immediately reinforced.	Behaviorism	This is a Behaviorist tenet, but Cognitivists and Constructivists would likely say “yes, sometimes.”
i. Meaningful content is better learned and longer retained than less meaningful content.	Constructivism Cognitivism	Both Cognitivists and Constructivists emphasize content that is meaningful to the learner, and Constructivists frequently use the term “meaning making.”
j. Learning is goal oriented.	Cognitivism	Cognitivists would emphasize that clear goals orient the learner and allowing learners to customize goals enhances motivation. Behaviorists would say that goals in the form of behavioral objectives should be established for the



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		learner. Constructivists would say learning is goal oriented “sometimes.”
k. Learning is the linking of new information to prior knowledge.	Cognitivism	This is a Cognitivist tenet but Constructivists would say “sometimes.” Behaviorists would say, “of course – that’s part of their environment, but if we can’t ascertain the range of prior knowledge in the learner population, we deal with the most common response.”
l. Learning involves organizing information.	Cognitivism	
m. Learning is the acquisition of cognitive and meta-cognitive structures.	Cognitivism	
n. Teaching is all about imparting knowledge.	Behaviorism	Cognitivists might agree, but would emphasize considering how the learner is receiving that knowledge.
o. Teaching is all about developing experiences and environments that enable learners to learn.	Constructivism Behaviorism Cognitivism	Behaviorists would focus on environmental stimuli and the observable responses they elicit. Cognitivists would focus on what the learner thinks about the stimuli, and the Constructivist would concentrate on the impact of the social environment.
p. The meaning of things in the world is unchangeable and independent of the observer and circumstances.	Behaviorism Cognitivism	Behaviorists and Cognitivists believe in an objective truth, but the Cognitivist would be more concerned about how the observer is perceiving meaning.
q. Observable behavior is more important than understanding the internal activities of the brain.	Behaviorism	
r. When designing instruction, the focus should be on simple elements: specific stimuli and responses.	Behaviorism	
s. Learning involves inputs, managed in short term memory, and committed to memory by coding for long-term recall.	Cognitivism	This principle originated with Cognitivists but Constructivists might agree.
t. Learners create knowledge as they attempt to understand their experiences.	Constructivism	
u. Knowledge is an objective that is attainable through either reasoning or experience.	Constructivism Cognitivism	Constructivists and Cognitivists would agree to this, but a Behaviorist would only agree with the “experience” part.