2022 ASSESSMENT REPORT

BHP315116 - PSYCHOLOGY

GENERAL COMMENTS

The written responses by students were of a high standard in general. In particular, students consistently demonstrated depth to their understanding of the syllabus through the generation of lengthy and comprehensive essays. Given the wide breadth of knowledge required to complete the written exam, students are commended for their careful and thoughtful responses.

Students are encouraged not to rely on pre-prepared responses when planning for this exam. The purpose of the Psychology exam is to provide unseen stimulus materials to students as a prompt for their discussions, and thus for examiners to measure their success in applying and responding to the stimuli. The better responses were from students whose essays had stimuli strongly embedded in their analysis. Use of the stimulus continues to be varied, and students are reminded not to re-write or paraphrase stimulus materials and instead use them as an opportunity to demonstrate their own critical evaluation of the psychological theories being considered.

Students are also encouraged to make sure that they are clear on the requirements in the exam. Students are only required to answer ONE essay in each section (three in total), and **not** to answer more than one essay in each section.

Students are reminded that their writing needs to be legible; if it cannot be deciphered, accurate assessment of their knowledge and understanding cannot be made.

Section A – Human learning

CONDITIONING

Stronger responses used the opportunity to apply Learning concepts and brought in examples of human applications of CC and OC. Stronger responses synthesised terminology and studies and were concise in their discussion of both theories, concepts and studies. Many students approached the answer by addressing classical and then operant conditioning. Some students did an outstanding explanation on classical condition with excellent description of elements and research, but sometimes to the detriment of their explanation of operant conditioning. Even though the focus is on Human Learning, some students included animal studies.

CRITERION 3

Stronger responses showed a wide range of concepts/theories as they related to the question. Most students were able to explain the relevant elements and processes, often applying them

to research. Better answers were able to synthesise them into their response, rather than just listing them.

Key terms and concepts were generally covered and explained well. Stronger responses discussed the key processes of CC in relation to the stimulus, specifically, stimulus 1. Most students explained classical conditioning through the Little Albert case, as a way of forming phobias and then linked this to stimulus 1 as a way they could be treated. Some students were able to explain systematic desensitisation in stimulus 1 but many did not explain it.

Most students addressed the 'reinforcement' concept in the question well and provided examples. Better responses defined the difference between positive and negative reinforcement and punishment, with examples. The schedules of reinforcements were also mentioned and were linked to the stimulus. Shaping was often not explained well, and students tried to apply it to stimulus 2 with little substantiation. Better answers recognised stimulus 2 as token economy and used it to explain and provide extra research.

Very few students provided analysis of classical and operant conditioning. Better answers were able to apply difference factors such as voluntary/involuntary, passive and active, and to validate each explanation of Human Learning.

Many students concluded with Two Factor learning, with examples, but did not link further. Stronger responses made connections between Two Factor learning and the question, relating to evaluation of learning theories.

CRITERION 7

Stronger responses showed a wide range of evidence, and discussed human experiments and their applications. Stronger responses briefly mentioned Pavlov and Skinner, but primarily discussed human studies such as Little Albert, the Shy Girl study, toilet training etc. Weaker responses described Skinner's rat study in detail and relied too much on animal studies and examples, rather than mentioning other human studies.

Discussion of the stimulus in the majority of answers was limited to stating the findings rather than providing further application. Weaker responses showed little analysis of the stimuli and primarily just repeated what was said, which showed little understanding. Stronger responses did provide some analysis and introduced further research. Stronger responses linked stimulus 1 to graduated exposure and proceeded to discuss this and other applications, but these responses were very few. Stronger responses recognised and explained systematic desensitisation and token economy. The Peter Rabbit study by Cover Jones (1924) was mentioned frequently in stronger responses and linked to the stimulus. Stronger responses provided additional applications with reference to research, such as Sue, Sue and Sue's (2006) flooding study. Some students interpreted stimulus 2 on token economy as being a form of shaping rather than being two separate applications of operant conditioning. Stronger responses supported the application of token economies with studies such as, Cohen and Filipczak (1971).

OBSERVATIONAL / COGNITION LEARNING

As in previous years, only a small number of students chose to answer the cognitive learning theories question. While there were some very strong responses, there were quite a few who chose this question without adequate preparation and were consequently unable to adequately explain or evaluate the Observational/Social Learning Theory. Weaker responses merely restated the content of the stimulus, making little attempt to explain Bandura's argument, theory, or research.

CRITERION 3

Most students were able to describe Bandura's study(s) and the key findings of these studies. Weaker responses tended to include an overly detailed retelling of the Bobo Doll studies, whereas stronger responses merely used these as a launching point to explain key concepts, such as the significance of real-life and symbolic models, as well as the characteristics of a model that increase the likelihood of human learning. The stimulus was particularly useful in eliciting and framing these ideas.

As in previous years, students approached evaluating the cognitive theories in one of two ways. Some responses framed their argument by comparing the behaviourist and cognitive approaches to the study of learning. This led to a sophisticated evaluation of the extent to which each cognitive learning theory attempted to counter the behaviourist argument that observable behaviour and reinforcement was central to the learning process.

Other students chose an alternative approach and evaluated each cognitive theory independently, and focussed on the criticisms of the research methodology engaged by the researchers, and the validity of making generalisations from animal studies to human applications. Either approach is equally valid.

CRITERION 7

Students who did well on this question were able to define and explain the concepts related to observational learning, highlighted in the stimuli, and make links between the stimulus and Bandura's Learning Theory. The stronger responses were able to make connections between Bandura's findings and the stimulus without exhaustive explanations of each of the studies conducted by Bandura and colleagues.

Students who included a range of empirical and real-life examples and evidence that went beyond the animal studies were rewarded.

The 'Transfer of Learning' stimulus was challenging as it had both explained the key elements of the theory and gave multiple human examples, leaving students with little to expand upon. Many students consequently briefly mentioned this theory then demonstrated their understanding by looking at alternative cognitive learning theories.

Section B – Remembering

This section was answered very well overall, with most students writing lengthy (over 2 pages) responses that referenced both stimulus materials and all required concepts. Students are reminded that good evaluation involves the use of evidence as well as theory. Simply repeating (paraphrasing, directly quoting, or summarising) material from the stimuli is insufficient; they are to be used as springboards for further elaboration (to confirm/support or challenge/refute theoretical models, concepts and/or empirical studies).

MEMORY

Stronger responses integrated an evaluation of multiple criticisms (strengths and limitations) of each theoretical model discussed.

Many students seemed thrown by the inclusion of false memory as a concept as well as presented in the stimulus materials. This caused some students to attempt to include reference to forgetting content. Students are encouraged to try to limit the scope of their responses to the component of the syllabus that their essay is addressing, even when other elements may also be linked.

CRITERION 4

Most students were able to demonstrate their knowledge of how encoding, storage and retrieval work are portrayed in different theories and models of memory. Most were able to discuss these processes in at least two memory models, with some also adding additional models to further support their discussions. Stronger detail and breadth of terminology enhanced these discussions considerably.

Weaker responses only listed definitions for encoding, storage and retrieval and did not subsequently connect these concepts to the models/theories of memory that were discussed, which limited their ability to portray depth of understanding.

Students should be mindful to engage meaningfully with the essay question itself – the dot pointed concepts provided need to be attended to in detail in their response.

For students who choose to draw a diagram to explain a model of memory, they are strongly encouraged to reference that diagram as part of their discussions.

CRITERION 7

Generally, most students were able to integrate the stimuli well, however weaker responses included a heavy reliance on direct quotes instead of elaborating further. For example, Stimulus 2 was used by most but those with stronger responses were able to make the connection with Loftus and Palmer, eyewitness testimony and leading questions.

Most students were successful in being able to identify the models of memory correctly and achieved some description of these models. Use of empirical evidence was well provided by stronger responses. Weaker responses relied more on theory explanation. The main empirical evidence provided was around Stimulus 1 with references to Sperling, Peterson and Peterson etc.

FORGETTING

Students who were very successful in demonstrating their understanding of forgetting were able to include perspectives of both organic and non-organic causes of forgetting, as well as explain the differences between these psychological and physiological causes.

The stronger responses were able to provide a range of theories and support this discussion with further examples of studies and relevant real-life human examples, showing comprehensive understanding.

Weaker responses tended to rely on directly quoting from the stimulus rather than adding further detail to what was already provided. When students only used the evidence provided it was difficult for the examiners to measure the depth or breadth of their understanding of forgetting.

Successful responses to this question included demonstrating causes of forgetting and then the expansion of their answers to include additional theories of forgetting and empirical evidence.

CRITERION 4

Most responses to this question constituted 3 or more pages. Stronger responses explained and evaluated up to five theories of Forgetting, which often included organic causes (Amnesia), and non-organic causes such as Retrieval Failure, Interference, Motivated Forgetting and Decay Theory. Some drew on concepts and models of Memory to demonstrate understanding of the broader topic of Remembering, whilst keeping the focus on Forgetting. Weaker responses explained Amnesia and Retrieval Failure only, rather than drawing on other relevant information in the course to explain why forgetting occurs.

Analysis of theories was considered and well placed by some students, such as, 'Decay Theory does not explain why some memories that are not retrieved regularly or for a long time can still be easily retrieved'. Other students offered simple analysis, such as, 'organic causes of forgetting cannot explain non-organic causes', which is technically correct but does not demonstrate as much depth of understanding. Some students did not offer any analysis at all.

Theories were often explained clearly, and linked to the stimulus items, with empirical evidence and sometimes examples to support. Many did not explain the difference between organic and non-organic causes, and some confused concepts, such as, anterograde and retrograde.

CRITERION 7

Students did well to answer the question, using both stimulus items, and explaining the concepts. Two of the concepts related to the stimulus items directly, so students did well to make sure they included the third concept – 'techniques for improving recall'. Stronger responses did this by linking to mnemonic devices and other techniques for improving encoding and/or retrieval.

The stimulus items often served as a launchpad to connect to other relevant information. Some students explained and analysed the stimulus items on Amnesia and Retrieval Failure theories in great depth, sometimes at the expense of analysing and including other theories.

Most students provided supporting empirical evidence and linked it well to the stimulus items. Weaker responses did not include much empirical evidence. Stronger responses quoted from the stimulus, but generally quotes were lacking. At the other extreme, some students wrote out the entire stimulus text verbatim, showing little understanding.

Section C Individual Differences

GENDER

In general, it was pleasing to note the length of the majority of these responses – which were 3 pages or more – and included detailed explanations of both the biological and environmental aspects of the course. Generally, both these sides were well-represented. Stronger responses were adept at relating the nature/nurture debate to appropriate theories and supporting evidence. Unpacking the discourse of this debate in relation to gender differences was a meaningful way of students demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the course content.

CRITERION 1

Overall, students appeared familiar with the expectations of the question and used the prompt from within the question to apply relevant theoretical content that aligned with both heredity and environmental arguments.

Students are reminded to always ground their discussions in Psychology – discussing the social and genetic aspects of gender can be useful if the connection is made to the psychological aspects but will not be sufficient on their own.

It was very good to see that students were able to discuss biological aspects of gender, and good responses included explanations regarding the impact of hormones and biological outcomes.

Stronger responses included students engaging with the 'other relevant information' aspect of the question to answer the question holistically, and include the interactionist principle as part of their discussions.

Many students who relied upon the use of a 'formula' or pre-prepared response struggled to demonstrate depth of understanding, as there was minimal contemporary research or progressive insight on the traditional nature-nurture theory.

CRITERION 7

It was pleasing to note that most students were able to support their discussion with relevant empirical evidence.

Most students were able to make the connection between Stimulus 1 and Kohlberg's Cognitive Development Theory, which was an excellent link to make.

Weaker responses reiterated the material presented in the stimulus, whilst the stronger ones were able to use the various concepts that were presented in the stimulus as supporting evidence for the nature/nurture debate.

Students are reminded that simply citing theories that are not related to the discussion at all (either their argument or the stimulus materials) limits their capacity to demonstrate their understanding.

INTELLIGENCE

Responses were very sound on this question, with the majority offering well-crafted and solidly rehearsed responses on and around heredity and environment, with select paragraphs on twin studies, adoption studies, enrichment studies and interactionist models as well as the theories of intelligence. However, the fact that intelligence is a hypothetical construct and why this is significant was rarely covered and would have provided students with an excellent opportunity to highlight their understanding of the content to a level of critical thinking.

CRITERION 1

Students often stated there were 3 theories/definitions of intelligence. The notion of interactionist theories was often dealt with in a limited manner. Stronger responses evaluated the different theories of intelligence, pointing out their similarities and differences and suggesting limitations.

Weaker responses sometimes included explanation of intelligence theories and/or testing which was not clearly linked to the question provided, covering irrelevant explanations of the development of intelligence testing. However, stronger responses that included this information demonstrated how it was relevant to the determination of biological and environmental influences on intelligence.

There seems to be some lack of understanding about the role of the environment among some students. The role of environmental influences is not limited to making up for poor genetics; the belief that intelligence is largely genetic, and enrichment is to help those with less potential achieve more, is erroneous.

Similarly, students should be reminded that environments are not only 'enriched' or 'deprived'; for the majority of us, our environments are 'average'.

CRITERION 7

Stronger responses used evidence from Stimulus 1 to analyse and evaluate Sternberg's Triarchic Theory and then dealt with Spearman's Two Factor Theory. Most responses also included an analysis and evaluation of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory. Evaluation included the strengths and limitations of each theory and some comment on the interrelationship between the theories and how they extend on or compare with each other. Spearman's 'g' factor was also linked to the measurement of IQ. Stimulus 2 prompted a more generalised response and an entry into the Flynn Effect.

There was a pleasing range of evidence presented for stronger responses, usually categorised as supporting the genetic, environmental (deprived or enriched) or interactionist perspectives. Most students had a balance of evidence for genetics and environment; many recognised that twin studies, while providing strong evidence for the influence of genetics, also provide unequivocal evidence for environmental influences.

However, some responses relied on antiquated evidence of the detailed presentation of a couple of studies (e.g., Genie and rat studies) at the expense of including a wider range of more recent and relevant **human** evidence.

Some responses utilised evidence without explaining the key findings. Others named a study or research type, without any explanation. For example, "adoption studies support environmental influences on intelligence" or "the Flynn effect supports environmental influences on intelligence".

The following information is included for clarification. Turkheimer's research on the heritability of IQ and SES highlights the importance of environmental advantage/disadvantage on cognitive development. Similarly, the Flynn Effect does not suggest that people are actually getting more 'intelligent' but that they are getting better at some of the things that IQ tests measure. IQ tests (which are inevitably biased as they must be standardised to a particular population) provide an aggregate score derived from a number of sub-tests; our increases in some areas outweigh losses in others such that the overall scores are increasing. Flynn himself suggests that IQ tests are a measure of "our adaptation to modernity". Intelligence is not rising; IQ test scores are rising in the developed and developing countries.

PERSONALITY

Most students provided a well-balanced debate with supporting evidence.

Simply repeating (paraphrasing, directly quoting, or summarising) material in the Stimuli is insufficient; they are to be used as springboards for further elaboration (to confirm/support or challenge/refute theoretical models, concepts and/or empirical studies).

CRITERION 1

Most students were successful in describing at least two different personality theories, with many demonstrating a sound understanding of three or four.

Many responses were coherent, cohesive and well-studied on the topic of trait and other theories of personality (especially psychodynamic and humanist, and a few on social cognitive and behavioural), although often not explicitly addressing the question regarding personality development. Linking the theories to the 'nature-nurture debate' of personality development is necessary.

Strong responses stood out for identifying the biological, environmental or interactionist stance of the theories, and used relevant evidence (such as twin studies, Bandura's Bobo doll experiment, or Mischel's marshmallow test and concept of delayed gratification), to support or refute the theories and/or the stimuli. Having said that though, students are reminded to avoid describing the studies (especially the Bobo Doll experiment) in so much detail, at the expense of omitting to explain how it influences the development of personality.

The inclusion of the assumptions of trait theory (that individuals have the same number, just in different levels of intensity; that traits are stable over time; and stable over situations) added a level of depth.

It was clear that this question appealed to many who utilised a template response, with many outlining content, theory, and concepts in the same manner, with set paragraphing for each of perspective (Jung/Freud, Costa and McCrae, Maslow, Rotter, Bandura, Bouchard and twin findings, heredity and environment, etc) usually in the same ordering. What is encouraged here, is that some effort is taken to clarify the points of theoretical differentiation of these explanations; establishing, essentially, theoretical pros and cons for each approach and any aspects of commonality.

Stronger responses argued a well-reasoned and coherent point of view with paragraphs connecting and flowing logically. These students were able to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses/limitations of perspectives very well.

CRITERION 7

The strongest responses were moving to deliver a balanced response, as required in the question. Links between the empirical evidence and Personality concepts/theories were explained fully and clearly, with the strongest responses providing appropriate supporting empirical research to polished and nuanced renditions of how genetic and environmental factors impact on personality.

Students who included a wide range of empirical and other evidence, as well as both stimulus pieces, performed strongly. The studies of Bouchard and McGue were used exclusively for supporting evidence in discussing genetic influences. Bandura's experiment on learning needed some explanation to fit the area of personality.

Stronger responses incorporated both stimuli seamlessly into their discussion, demonstrating their sophisticated grasp and command of the content, further reinforced by relevant empirical evidence. Weaker responses tended to be mere summaries, particularly of Stimulus 1. Students are reminded that the stimulus content needs some attention, beyond a summary paraphrase or cursory mention that does little to showcase competencies on 7.

Many students seemed less confident in their understanding of biological/genetic influences on personality, and Stimulus 2 was largely regurgitated. Quite a few responses added nothing to very little to what was already provided.

Several students would have benefited from thinking about, and editing, what they were writing, rather than simply regurgitating what they had rehearsed, to ensure they were (a) addressing the questions posed and (b) were logical in their statements (e.g. the statement that "Jung (1933) disagreed with Freud's (1940) idea that…" is not possible) and not contradictory.

Investigation Project: Psychobiological Processes

GENERAL COMMENTS

Overall, the standard of the reports was high. Most reports were researched well, referenced and met the requirements described in the guidelines in terms of presentation and structure. However, the word count was underutilised with many of the reports. Although students are not marked down for this explicitly, often having a brief report meant that students had missed the opportunity to convey their understanding, research or analysis effectively. The Discussion section was often too brief in weaker reports, and had limited or no reference to prior research and theory to give support to the hypothesis being investigated.

In general, students were able to develop topics with an interesting exploration of visual perception or altered states of consciousness. The most popular topics included the Stroop Effect, Perceptual Set, Sleep and Colour.

CRITERION 2

Most students were able to make direct connections between the focus of their research and the topic. A few weaker reports lacked this connection. As such, many were able to use their introduction to outline theories and/or concepts of Psychobiological Processes first. Stronger responses provided clarity based on this foundation to link the particular focus of their investigation.

Strong answers provided an analysis of the theories surrounding their focus (visual perception or altered states). The very strong visual perception folios made a direct connection with theories of processing (top-down or bottom up) as relevant, which was an effective way to connect their research hypothesis as well as address criterion expectations.

Weaker responses only described their chosen area of visual perception or altered states of consciousness without providing any explanation as to the why or how. Further, weaker responses used a considerable portion of the Introduction explaining the intricacies of other research to a very high level of detail.

Students are reminded that the research and information presented in the Introduction should lead naturally to the hypothesis.

Students who presented analytical discussions that related their findings back to prior research, drawing conclusions in a meaningful way, were more successful. It is important for students to make explicit connections in the Discussion between the findings of the primary research and secondary studies discussed in the Introduction of the report. Stronger responses also extended this connection by making statements about the implications of the primary investigation findings and real-life in the Discussion section as well.

CRITERION 6

This criterion was generally well-addressed and highlighted that the key expectations of criterion 6 were generally well-understood by students.

Strong responses made a very clear link between hypothesis and research design.

Achieving clarity in the methodology through use of numbered dot points and subheadings proved to be quite effective for many students.

Students were generally able to convey that an appropriate hypothesis and research method could be selected, and explicitly stated accurate IV and DVs with a clear methodology and reference to ethical considerations.

Students do not need to define these concepts in their methodology (explaining what an IV or DV is, or explaining each of the ethical considerations). Students only need to explain what they did to mitigate and minimise any possible ethical concerns and what the IV and DV was. Students needed to really think about how each would apply specifically to their own research. For example, mentioning the need to debrief participants often meant merely thanking participants. Presenting a list of ethical considerations without relevance to what was done to address the specifics of the study at hand should be avoided.

In terms of sample space, students really needed to make sure that there was a good level of specificity. Some weaker reports failed to mention the number of participants or sampling methods, for example.

Weaker reports did not include graphs, and did not generalise the data (25% instead of 30/120 for example). Students should also use the Results section to explain the results (but not analyse).

All graphs/tables need to be labelled appropriately with a descriptor underneath. Students should be encouraged to display clearly labelled graphs/tables and carefully analysing data

(presented as means, percentages or correlations etc). Manipulation of the data was important. Bar charts and line graphs are used to represent specific relationships within data. Pie charts are not generally used in psychological reports.

Many weaker responses included raw data in the Results section. This rightfully belongs in the Appendices and only if referred to in the body of the report.

Students are reminded to be mindful of how they present their data. For example, if students are not using gender as an IV and it is not important to their study, then it does not need to be graphed. Students should not independently graph their data for each group or component of their IV, as this makes comparing the different groups difficult.

CRITERION 8

Students are to be commended in the writing quality of the report. In general, the IP Guidelines were well-followed and the submitted reports had been proof-read thoughtfully. It was pleasing that the majority of students wrote reports in the objective form of third person and used grammar correctly adhering to the IP guidelines regarding the composition of the written report.

References need to be under appropriate subheadings for type of source used and the personal investigation also needs to be included. Journal articles found on the Internet are still journal articles and should be referenced as such with the DOI included.

The majority of students included at least 3 different types of sources. Stronger reports avoided using weaker referencing sources (SimplyPsychology, Wikipedia, Alleydog, etc) which isn't the most reliable secondary data source.

The majority of students also stayed within the required word limit of 800-1200 words. A reminder that the Method and Results sections do not contribute to the final word count. It is important to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between sections. There was clear evidence to suggest that students attempted to make the connection between background information and the primary data gathered in their investigations. However, the conclusion of whether the hypotheses were supported/not supported needs to be linked directly to the primary research/studies provided in the Introduction.

Students should minimise the over-use of direct quotes where possible to show that they have a complete understanding of the concepts/theories provided.