

2023 ASSESSMENT REPORT

BHP315116 PSYCHOLOGY

General Comments

It is recommended this report be read in conjunction with previous examination reports for BHP315116 and the 2023 examination paper, available on the TASC website as these provide valuable information regarding the criteria assessed.

There were some excellent responses to the exam questions and students are to be applauded on their skilful handling of the exam paper. The more successful students were thoroughly prepared to be able to demonstrate a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics, perspectives, concepts examined, analysing and evaluating stimulus materials, providing relevant human research/empirical evidence as well as reference to classic studies. Students must be prepared to go beyond the research given in the stimuli. It is important for students to read the exam paper carefully and answer what is asked of them; namely, to refer to the stimuli when answering the question. Stimuli were designed to act as a springboard for further discussion re concepts referred to and it is insufficient to paraphrase the stimulus pieces. Although an improvement on previous year, Critical evaluation was lacking in many responses.

Section A - Remembering

Question 1: Memory

General

Overall, this section was answered well, with students able to describe, and often analyse, a number of theories (or models) and respond to the questions by drawing on two or more concepts and drawing links to the stimulus items. Students struggled with the amount of detail in Stimulus 1 to highlight clear knowledge, learning and understanding about the Baddeley & Hitch Working Memory Model. Diagrams were employed by a few students which gave them a visual basis upon which to formulate their responses.

Criterion 4

Many students were able to cite the names and theorists of at least four memory models/theories in their introduction and then were able to analyse and critically evaluate them in the discussion section of their answer. Stronger responses were able to use information from the stimulus as well as provide further details about the Working Memory Model and combined this with evidence. Stronger students presented a comprehensive understanding of the Atkinson and Shiffrin (A&S) model which was complemented with a good range of evidence highlighting the different stores. Better answers also linked the A&S model to Stimulus 2 and the similarities between Clive Wearing and the HM case.

Stimulus 2 gave most students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of storage in Long Term Memory by relating it to the structural organisation of memory: procedural/ declarative and implicit/explicit

memory. Many better answers made reference to Semantic Networking Theory and how this is an alternative model for LTM organisation. Stronger responses evaluated the theories (stated their strengths and limitations) with reference to other theories and the theory's ability to explain encoding storage and retrieval. Weaker students relied too heavily on the information provided in Stimulus 1 and failed to elaborate with supporting information. In weaker answers the concept 'encoding' wasn't always well addressed by students, however stronger responses explained in depth the significance of encoding, linking its importance to memory and storage. Weaker students tended to suggest that one of the key features of 'storage' is that it has three storage components/systems being Sensory memory, STM and LTM but fail to associate this with the A&S model.

When discussing the A&S model, a number of students failed to mention the LTM or incorporate evidence such as the Serial Position Effect, HM case or any evidence to highlight the LTM as a separate store. Selective attention was also a common omission when presenting the A&S model along with any mention of the structural features of the model.

Criterion 7

Stronger answers summarised studies and linked the findings explicitly to models/theories by explaining how the study supported the theory. Weaker students relied too heavily on Stimulus 1 as a major source of their answer and were unable to provide any empirical evidence to support their point of view in relation to the Working Memory Model (WMM). Supporting evidence for the WMM should have included Dual task experiments. The Dual task experiments highlight separate WMM components of the Phonological Loop(PL) and Visuo-spatial Sketchpad(VSS).

The KF Case study was also mentioned by some students and ideally markers were looking for responses that used this case as evidence to support the WMM as KF's impairment was mainly for verbal information – his memory for visual information was largely unaffected. This shows that there are separate STM components for visual information (VSS) and verbal information (phonological loop). Stronger students were able to evaluate research findings and utilise them in their arguments when debating the various strengths and weaknesses of the memory theories they were discussing. Weaker responses often stated or briefly discussed terms and memory models separately to evidence. This evidence was often mentioned independently to the model and rather, only mentioned in relation to Stimulus 2. By drawing the two together, it would have consolidated a stronger response.

Question 2: Forgetting

General

There were a good number of strong responses to this question, with answers tending to be polarised between strong and very weak/failing responses.

Responses that were not successful did not adequately explain the required concepts, discuss more than one theory, provide evidence and evaluation. These responses tended to simply explain a few concepts and/or theories, and very generally made reference to stimuli without explaining them.

Many students launched into a lengthy explanation of methods of enhancing memory and mnemonic devices, having expected it to be part of the question, as in the past. When this was linked to their explanations of forgetting, it worked well – however others simply explained mnemonic devices as an add-on, and they would have been better spending the time on information that directly related to the question, or linking their explanation of mnemonics to the processes of forgetting.

Criterion 4

Many responses that worked well commenced with a definition of forgetting and Ebbinghaus' forgetting curve, which then led them into the reasons for/causes of forgetting. These were typically discussed as organic causes and non-organic causes, elaborating on topics such as dementia, Alzheimer's and brain trauma; positioning amnesia within these and correctly explaining retrograde and anterograde amnesia. This was complemented by non-organic theories of forgetting including Interference, Retrieval Failure, Motivated Forgetting and Decay theories. These students also cited and explained studies that provided supporting evidence for each of the causes. Strong responses also provided a critique of the theories. These responses were well-organised, first explaining the theory, then noting the evidence that supports the theory (name of researcher and a summary of the research) and concluding with a critique noting the theory's strengths and limitations.

Consistent areas of confusion were:

- Organic and non-organic causes, citing theories of forgetting as being organic causes and brain injury/insult/disease as being non-organic causes. Further to this, students are reminded that the brain is an organ; hence issues with the brain itself, as an organ, are organic causes.
- Retroactive and proactive interference, confusing the two. Further to this, students are reminded that 'retro' refers to past, and 'pro' refers to future.
- Retrograde and anterograde amnesia, confusing the two. Again, students are reminded that 'retro' refers to the past therefore retroactive will be acting on past memories.
- Many students used consolidation as a 'theory' of forgetting; i.e., forgetting due to lack of consolidation. Other responses used consolidation as a way of improving memory. Further to this, students are reminded that lack of consolidation/encoding failure is not strictly speaking a theory of forgetting; rather, the information has not been encoded and therefore not stored to begin with (pseudo-forgetting). Stronger responses differentiated between pseudo-forgetting and forgetting.
- Another point of confusion for some was regarding the concept of decay: decay theory of forgetting is not the same as decay in SM/STM – the latter precludes forgetting as the information does not make it to LTM to be stored/remembered or forgotten to memory trace decay over time. Numerous students referred to decay theory as relating to short-term memory. While this is true, it is not the same as the decay theory of forgetting.

Criterion 7

In general, the stimuli were very well-utilised, and there were a number of detailed, thorough responses. Good responses discussed at least two organic causes of forgetting and at least two theories of forgetting in detail, including referring to and explaining one or more studies for each. Weaker responses included

only one reference to research evidence, and little or no evaluation of the causes of forgetting (i.e., analysing and evaluating the explanations for forgetting). Stimulus items were well-integrated into the response where applicable. Many responses used Stimulus 1 to connect to Alzheimer's and other organic causes of forgetting and used Stimulus 2 to connect to either Interference Theory of forgetting, or to enhancement of memory/methods of improving memory. Interestingly this stimulus could be used to discuss either/both organic and non-organic causes of forgetting; with the organic causes relating to lack of consolidation (such as may occur with a head trauma) and non-organic causes focusing on the idea of interference, as a segue to Interference Theory.

Section B – Individual differences

Question 3: Gender

General

Students were generally well prepared and able to provide analysis and evaluation of the theories of gender and relevant empirical evidence to support. Students often engaged well with the question. The quality of the responses this year was generally high, indicating good preparation and understanding of the topic.

While responses were often formulaic, strong students were able to adapt their responses to give a sustained explanation of the concepts and stimulus effectively. Weaker responses outlined the theories and/or studies without explaining how these explain the differences between biological and environmental factors in accounting for the formation of gender differences. Some responses referred only to the stimulus items and struggled to link these to theories or other empirical evidence in the course.

Responses often had good coverage of relevant theories. Some spent too much time discussing the biological explanation to the detriment of a balanced discussion.

Criterion 1

Most students were able to define and differentiate concepts such as gender and brain differences, but some did not define gender stereotypes in such a strong way. Solid responses were able to present biological differences in terms of hormones and brain differences and go on to discuss social learning theories.

Students covered a range of relevant theories including biological and a range of environmental theories. Good responses included at least three well explained environmental theories. These were often well understood and included relevant theorists. Most students were able to discuss limitations. Strong responses were able to integrate limitations of theories and research into their argument.

Criterion 7

Good use of the stimulus items to both support and refute the biological and environmental explanations. The stimulus items provided opportunities for students to link to theories, concepts and research. Many students were able to select relevant information in the stimulus items and these were well placed in their analysis of theories.

Students are reminded that the strongest evidence to use is empirical evidence (such as experiments and case studies) and the stimulus items. This was mostly well done, but there were some responses that were lacking. Weaker responses only referred to the stimulus items without drawing on empirical evidence or linking to relevant theories and concepts. Care needs to be taken describing old case studies and experiments (e.g., David Reimer and Bandura’s research); always ensure that more than just a repetition of the experiment or case study is discussed.

Question 4: Intelligence

General

Students’ responses were varied, giving the full range of assessment. Although it was good to start with definition/s of intelligence, it appears that students had prepared for intelligence as a concept, as in previous years, as many students had spent quite a deal of time discussing theorists. Although this was a good start to the answer, too much time was spent on this to the detriment of part b. Some students based their answer on part a, leaving out discussion on genetics.

Many students started with an introduction, explaining what they would discuss. This too took valuable time from answering the question thoroughly. Others used the definition as their introduction. Many answers were too short to cover this question thoroughly. Weaker answers lacked evidence for part b.

Criterion 1

Most of the responses discussed the three concepts in the question. Discussion of IQ was often very thorough. A few students only provided a definition, whereas others looked at different IQ tests. Some evaluated them in line with alternative intelligence theorists to offer some criticism. Many considered cultural bias. Some students showed the development of intelligence testing. A few responses made a good connection for the use of IQ in research for the nature/nurture debate. Many made this connection to stimulus 1 in particular. Environmental influences and interaction were mostly covered. Weaker answers struggled to do so. This meant that those who covered these and included genetic influences were able to address part b. A few students didn't include much on genetics and seemed to answer only part a.

Some students discussed interaction without mentioning the word itself. It was good to see discussion of the reaction range, rubber band scenario and reference to Scarr.

A few students used percentages for genetic and environmental influences, which unless incorporated well, detracted from their answer. Stronger responses included critical analysis of each perspective.

Criterion 7

Stimulus 1

Most students referred to this and recognised data from Bouchard and McGue. Some students were able to use this well to support the influence of genetics. Some students mentioned the relevant data, but offered little explanation as to how it provides support for genetics as an influence on intelligence. Some students used incorrect data even though it was clear in the stimulus. Most used the twins as their evidence, but others were able to consider and analyse other data from the stimulus. A few discussed the overall pattern of high genetic overlap giving a higher correlation of intelligence.

Some students were able to provide environmental evidence here as well. A few only discussed environmental evidence. Some students were able to offer criticisms of this data.

Stimulus 2

A few students missed using the stimulus in their answer. Many used the environmental influences listed at the beginning of the first paragraph. It was also often used to establish both genetic and environmental factors playing a part to introduce interaction.

Evidence

This was lacking in many answers. Better answers provided clear and well analysed evidence for both sides of the argument. Most were able to use stimulus 1 as discussed above. Many added adoption studies for the genetic argument. A few also used data from stimulus 1 here as well. Environmental studies mostly used were: Scarr and Weinberg, Flynn, Romanian and Iranian Orphanages. Many relied only on 1 piece of evidence, whereas others were able to discuss many. Turkheimer was also often included and discussed well. Some researchers mentioned were incorrect or discussed with the wrong evidence. Many adoption studies were used incorrectly. Some students provided evidence here for one side of the argument and then said it was the other.

Question 5: Personality

General

This question was undertaken by a small cohort of students. Most students were well prepared to provide a sound definition of personality and to provide theories to explain its development. Students who were well prepared, providing theories and empirical evidence for both the biological and environmental perspectives, were rewarded for their endeavour, especially with emphasis upon the biological side (highlighted in the question part b). Many responses were well-studied on the topic of trait theories and theories of such as psychodynamic and humanist, with fewer discussing social cognitive and/or behavioural. Students should be mindful to attend to the question, as some students tended to present a summation of all theories, rather than directly engage with the question/s posed and the stimulus material.

Criterion 1

Strong responses to part a were provided by those students who defined and discussed personality, measures of personality and its overall development influenced by aspects of both genetics and environment. Weaker responses seemed to mention these ideas in superficial ways, including referencing Stimulus 1 text without additional information. Students should be reminded that concepts from part a should not be overlooked and play a key role in the overall written response. Sound introductions with detailed definitions of what is personality enabled many students to introduce their responses effectively. Stronger responses were able to argue a well-reasoned point of view regarding personality development, and theoretical perspectives were often robust, though overall empirical evidence was not always so pronounced. Students should be reminded that a comprehensive discussion requires both theory and a wide range of empirical evidence.

Criterion 7

Stronger responses used both Stimulus 1 and 2 well, beyond a token mention. Weaker responses relied heavily upon Stimulus 1 stating theories ‘word for word’ from Figure 4 (the diagram) without elaboration, perceiving the spectrum provided to be fact and using only descriptions, theorists, and dates from the diagram. Stronger responses were able to go beyond Stimulus 1, elaborating upon theories mentioned and others; both trait and psychodynamic theories seemed the theories clearly understood by many students. Although with that said, there were some exemplary responses that discussed humanism, behaviourism and social cognitive theories/ists in a nuanced and thoughtful manner. Further work could be spent on the biological aspect of this area of the course; some students were able to discuss this well with a focus upon twin studies, genetics, and case studies for evidence. Weaker responses provided very little regarding the possible influence of biology. Stimulus 2 was more challenging for weaker students, with the stimulus often simplistically referred to (using the title only). Stronger responses made good use of the stimulus and were able to discuss the role of tests, including types – projective and objective – examples, discussion of bias, limitations and with evaluation evident in very strong responses.

Section C – Psychological Processes

Question 6: Visual Perception

Criterion 2

Overall, students successfully answered part a of the question, addressing the three main concepts in relation to perception. In many cases this was in detriment to part b. In order to address both part a and part b of the question, Bottom-up processing needed to be addressed as well as Top-down processing. Gestalt principles were mentioned in some responses, but they were not used to support either Bottom-up and Top-down and were referred to as ‘Perceptual Set’ rather than ‘Perceptual Principles’. Several responses discussed visual constancy as a concept to support Bottom-up processing, rather than Top-down processing. Most students discussed Perceptual set, in particularly ‘Context’ and ‘Past experience’ and they linked to Stimulus 1.

Stronger responses addressed perceptual elements and discussed how they either support the view of Top-down or Bottom-up processing. These responses also included additional concepts not identified in the question or stimuli, such as the processes of sensation and perception, depth cues (monocular/binocular/pictorial). Size constancy was explained reasonably well using Stimulus 2; Shape, Orientation and Brightness constancy were included as well. Furthermore, stronger responses discussed the role of perceptual set in terms of context, past experiences, motivation, emotion and culture. Some solid responses defined Illusions and explained how they support the Top-down processing perspective. Several students also utilised this concept to analyse one of the limitations of Top-down perspective (e.g., how the perspective does not explain why illusions occur regardless of people’s conscious awareness of it). Physiological factors that affect the eyes were mentioned in several responses to address the limitations of Bottom-up processing. Neisser’s Perceptual Cycle theory was often included as a conclusion as a way to emphasis the interaction between both types of processing.

Criterion 7

The stimuli were generally used well by many students, however some responses only restated the information provided in the stimuli. Stronger use of the stimuli included reference to multiple concepts and used the stimuli as a springboard for discussing similar studies. The majority of students referred to the B/13 image from stimulus 1 and were able to explain the study then go on to discuss perceptual set and supporting studies. Most students included information from stimulus 2 in their answer. The better responses explained size constancy and how it was used in deception and were able to provide another example of their own, usually Mr SB.

Several students were able to provide everyday life examples for visual constancies and perceptual set (emotion and culture). Stronger responses included empirical evidence and research findings to support their responses. Additionally, these responses effectively explained how empirical evidence and research findings supported concepts within either the Bottom-up or Top-down Processing perspective. Students are advised to include years in references to enhance the evidentiary basis of their responses.

Question 7: Consciousness

General

Responses with opening paragraphs introducing the topic and concepts in a considered manner, rather than a remembered list of disjointed points, were rewarded, in that they helped to structure the rest of the response. Students are reminded that when using analogies such as Freud's iceberg or James' stream, these need explanation, and it is not sufficient to merely state that 'consciousness is like an iceberg' without saying how or in what way. Many students were well prepared for part b of the question and were able to explain either dream or sleep theories. There was a good balance between those who chose one area to focus upon and those that selected theories from both. Giving students a choice to evaluate theories of sleep or dreaming seemed to be a positive aspect of the question; most students tended to favour their strength, although students should be reminded that theories and empirical evidence is required to ensure critical evaluation, which supports a well-structured, coherent argument.

Criterion 2

Strong responses to part a were provided by those students who defined and discussed the differences between Normal Waking and Altered States of Consciousness. Weaker responses provided generalisations on sleep, or in some cases provided inaccurate or incomplete information. Responses that demonstrated an understanding of the continuum (or 'stream') of consciousness that included such states as daydreaming, meditation, hypnosis and sleep, for instance, were rewarded. Part a required students to provide explanation and demonstrate understanding of three concepts; stronger responses were able to demonstrate knowledge through both definitional information and the use of the appropriate stimulus material. Weaker responses only repeated information from the stimuli or placed the concept within a sentence in a token manner, without further explanation.

Criterion 7

Generally, most students showed a clear understanding of the stages of the sleep cycle and the physiological measures of these linked to Stimulus 1. Stronger responses were able to use the stimulus as a 'springboard' for further discussion, linked to empirical evidence. Weaker responses merely repeated the stimulus content without adding to it, which is insufficient to demonstrate understanding. This was especially evident when examining Stimulus 2. Stimulus 2 tended to be simply paraphrased by weaker students. Stronger responses referred to attention, both selective and divided, and/or to levels of awareness in the NWC when referring to controlled and automatic processes. Some students also went on to provide sound evidence, such as Duncan (1993) – tasks that are similar; familiar and simple become automatically processed; the Stroop Effect (where automatic processing overrides controlled); Schneider and Shiffrin (1977); and/or the Cocktail Party Effect. Weaker responses used the phrase 'evidence supports this' without stating what that evidence was or how it supported a theory and/or idea.

Investigation Project

The overall standard of the Investigation Projects this year was very good. It was clear that most students had used the TASC Psychology IP guidelines to structure an appropriate report, which supported them meeting the standards set down for criterion assessed.

There was a wide variety of topics selected by students, as Human Learning does offer quite a breadth of topics for investigation. Strong reports demonstrated a very good understanding of their chosen area of Human Learning in both research, experiment, and analysis. Operant Conditioning and Observational Learning-Social Cognitive Learning were particularly popular learning theories for students, especially in relation to reinforcement-based puzzle experiments and imitation of model activities, with some innovative experiments created by students.

Although with that said, it is cautionary to add that it was important that incentive-based experiments based upon operant conditioning were required to provide evidence of human learning, rather than motivation, memory and/or 'one-off' test experiences.

Fewer students chose topics such as classical conditioning, as this possibly challenged them regarding creating an appropriate ethical design and examine topics, such as phobias.

Generally, students were able to use the guidelines well and strong responses were able to effectively use the word count and draw inferences from a wide range of secondary sources, which contributed to the overall quality of their report.

Criterion 3

There was an array of topics investigated this year and some students should be commended for creative, effective experiments from within the Human Learning Module.

Strong responses drew from a range of sources and were able to provide a sound basis in both theory and research for their investigation. Weaker students laboured over general areas of Human learning in their introduction, before focusing upon their specific chosen topic area; a review of Introduction requirements would support focused approach from students. A more succinct approach to topic selection and the role of an effective literature review would support students overall report writing process. Most students showed a sound understanding of their chosen area of learning, which fed into both their experiment,

introduction, and discussion. Stronger student responses were able to successfully draw comparisons between the findings of these secondary research studies and their own primary investigation. Weaker responses provided a more generalised introduction leading to re-telling of theories in their discussion, without a genuine connect to their primary data.

When the topic of conditioning was chosen, students should be encouraged to include more research examples citing human participants, rather than limiting their evidence to Pavlov, Skinner, and Thorndike, for example. In some cases, there was a lack of empirical evidence to support theoretical perspectives; this in turn lead to challenges for students with their discussion, especially regarding how their research applied to real life situations and to relevant psychological principles.

Criterion 6

Strong student reports presented a clear, concise, and measurable operationalised hypothesis and could clearly highlight the IV and DV of their study and present a well-designed experiment. These students were able to write the Method section concisely and in a way that allowed the reader to understand the experiment. Most students had an appropriate hypothesis and reasonable attempts at identifying IV and DV. Weaker responses often presented long, confusing hypotheses which made it difficult to develop a sound methodology to measure, and this would have ramifications for their Results and Analysis.

The role of the operationalised hypothesis cannot be understated for a successful investigation, and it is recommended that both teacher and students ensure that this is a focus for future investigations.

The interpretation of data and presentation of findings was generally well done by students; however, a common omission was a title for figures and/or concise explanation of said figure – it is important to present graphs with a clear title of what it is showing, along with a clear statement of key findings underneath.

Strong responses used only a small number of relevant figures and tables for results; labelled appropriately, aligned with their hypothesis, and representing the IV and DV. Some students presented too many graphs, pie charts and other various forms of data collation; students should be mindful of result summation. Weaker responses struggled to adequately summarise data in the results section, often having graphs and tables which either repeated the same information or didn't summarise succinctly, which lead to inadequate analysis and discussion. Students should be reminded that raw data (either tabled or graphed) must be included in the appendices and referenced (referred to) in the body of the report. Several students included graphed raw data in the body of the report, and a number did not include the raw data at all in their appendix.

Some reports this year had very small sample sizes, especially when testing multiple variables. It is encouraged to try to work on larger samples sizes, where available, and think about ideas related to experimental design, such as using a repeated and independent measures design. And when a small sample is used, students are encouraged to provide a brief explanation that supports possible limitations.

Ethics considerations were discussed and enacted relatively well by most students. Stronger responses explained specific ethical principles in relation to their study, in a contextual manner, rather than generically. In relation to this, students are reminded to ensure that any correlating materials presented in the Method that is related to the Procedure, (for example, a consent form and/or debriefing statements) are clearly labelled and found in the appendices.

Criterion 8

Largely students were able to carry out well-balanced research in relation to the topic, with the majority writing a scientific report that adhered to the Psychology IP TASC Guidelines. The quality of reports was very good, with some producing thoughtful and innovative experiments for the topic of human learning, many of which demonstrated some excellent report writing. Sound responses presented well in terms of formatting, using appropriate subheadings, working within the word limit, and presenting proofread, polished responses. Stronger reports made use of the full word count and made clear connections between background information, relevant theories, research, and primary data collected. An effective Discussion by most students explained primary findings and evaluated theories outlined in their Introduction.

Overall referencing was sound for most students, although with that said there were challenges for the weaker investigations, centring around in-text citations, appropriate APA referencing conventions/formatting and the identification of 'types' of research in the students' reference list. A closer examination of the Psychology TASC IP Guidelines would support future students, as well as guidance regarding what types are effective research sources for an investigation project should be used.

Generally, students presented a good, well organised appendix which highlighted key components of their study, which were referred to within their report. A smaller number of students failed to include components such as ethical statements and/or forms, instructions for participants, the instruments used, recording sheet, de-briefing statement, and raw data.

Students are continued to be encouraged to find a balance between all sections of the report, to proofread their final report carefully and review aspects of tense, referencing and word count.