2024 ASSESSMENT REPORT
BHP315116 PSYCHOLOGY

General Comments

It is recommended this report be read in conjunction with previous examination reports for BHP315116 and the 2024 examination paper, available on the TASC website, as these provide valuable information regarding the criteria assessed.

Folio Component

Overall Comment

The overall standard of the Investigation Project this year was very good. Most candidates had used the TASC Psychology IP Guidelines to structure an appropriate report, which supported them in meeting the standards set down for criterion assessment.

There was a wide variety of topics selected by candidates; Remembering offers quite a breadth of topics for primary research. With that said, the majority of candidates investigated topics within the sub-unit, Memory. Topics that were particularly popular included false memory, misinformation, schema theory, serial position effect, context and retrieval cues, mnemonic devices, interference theory, iconic/echoic memory in sensory memory.

Generally, candidates were able to use the guidelines effectively to complete a well-researched folio.

Criterion 4

Largely, candidates were able to select and develop topics that were an appropriate and thoughtful exploration of Remembering. However, some investigations were interconnected to other areas of the course such as learning, gender and sleep. Whilst these were often interesting and were sound experiments, they did not always prioritise a clear connection to the topic of Remembering.

Stronger folios were able to introduce relevant terms, theories and models, especially with the use of research pertinent to their experiment and research aims. The consistency of this process allowed for both appropriate and relevant investigations and well executed folios. Weaker candidates tended to draw heavily upon excessive definitions in the Introduction, with many of these not necessarily relevant to their specific topic area. This at times lead to ineffectual inferences and analysis when later discussing their primary data. It is recommended that when candidates are introducing their investigation area that a relevant (and pertinent) range of terms/theories are presented that will inform the reader of their specific focus area.

Effective Discussions drew valid connections between findings and previous research, connecting seamlessly with the ideas outlined in the Introduction. Stronger candidates expanded upon the possible trends/patterns revealed in their data, making inferences between their findings to other stated research and the real-world, whilst weaker candidates tended to be descriptive only.

Criterion 6

Candidates who were able to execute a good Method provided a clear research design, with a sound operationalised hypothesis that identified independent and dependent variables. Methodologies were, overall, comprehensive and replicable, with candidates often opting for a step-by-step procedural approach. In contrast, a weaker hypothesis, often not operationalised, led to challenges for the candidate, not only within the procedure but also in the interpretation of the data, leading to vague conclusions and basic analysis.

It is recommended that future students may increase the effectiveness of their Method by focusing upon such elements as the allocation of a sample (issues with the use of the word random), examining the differences between extraneous and confounding variables, and creating an effective operationalised hypothesis (IV/DV).

Explanations of Ethical Considerations by most candidates was effective and suitable. Generally, candidates specified in a clear manner how they had accounted for ethics in their research. Stronger candidates provided evidence that they understood the role of an appropriate consent form, presented in the appendices, as well as directly referring to specific ethical considerations applicable to their own research. Weaker explanations discussed ethics in general and did not directly address specific considerations, within the context of their investigation. It was noted that some reports did not provide a consent form in the Appendices; it is recommended that candidates do this in future. It is also recommended that candidates using participants under 16 years of age justify more explicitly this process of selection, as well as providing information relating to informed consent, especially pertaining to permission being sought from the relevant teacher, parent and/or principal.

Generally, Results were conveyed effectively and clearly, with figures in the most part, accurately titled, labelled and with a brief explanatory note. There were a variety of graphs used with a varying level of success. Stronger candidates prioritised figures that effectively conveyed manipulated data that was explicit to their hypothesis. Once again, this year, we remind students to only provide manipulated data in the Results section, with raw data in the Appendices. The effectiveness of data presentation often played out in the Discussion, with stronger candidates creating valid connections, with cautious, yet pertinent conclusions.

Criterion 8

On the whole, candidates followed the Guidelines in an appropriate manner, implementing an effective reporting style that followed the formatting requirements.

Stronger candidates had an appropriate balance between reporting sections, with well written Discussions that made connections to both primary research, background information, explaining potential limitations and solutions for future research.

Most candidates made effective use of the word limit of 1200 words, albeit a few weaker candidates that only ‘just’ made it to the 800-word minimum. A focus in future on meeting the word limit may help some candidates when developing aspects of their overall arguments.

Stronger candidates were able to reference accurately and ensure that their references were truly integrated to extend their investigation and support their primary data. Alternatively, weaker candidates often made errors utilising a consistent method of referencing. Candidates are reminded that the IP Guidelines have information related to APA referencing conventions and that all steps should be taken to communicate referencing conventions correctly. Future candidates should also be reminded that a Reference Section is not a Bibliography.

Appendices were employed appropriately by most candidates, with stronger folios appropriately providing all essential information. It is a recommendation to future candidates to carefully review this aspect of their report. For example, all links provided in an Appendices must be able to be accessed by the reader, hence a mindful approach for links that may be part of a personal Google Drive and/or external link that will identify the candidate. Candidates are also advised to ensure no identifiers appear within the Appendices; this includes names of students/teacher/school, and that the student declaration form is not part of a candidate's folio submission.

Written Component

There were some outstanding responses to the exam questions, and students should be commended for their adept handling of the exam paper. The most successful candidates were well-prepared, demonstrating a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the topics, perspectives, and concepts examined. They effectively analysed and evaluated the stimulus materials, provided relevant human research and empirical evidence, and referenced classic studies. Candidates must be ready to extend beyond the information provided in the stimuli. It is crucial for candidates to read the exam paper carefully and respond precisely to what is asked, specifically referring to the stimuli in their answers. The stimuli are intended to serve as a springboard for further discussion of the concepts mentioned, and merely paraphrasing the stimulus pieces is insufficient. Students are reminded that to receive at least a SA they need to answer or write something on all three sections of the exam.

Section A: Individual Differences

Question 1: Gender (150 candidates)

Overall comment

The broad nature of the question lent to both a discussion on development and/or identity. Most students were apt in providing an either/or type approach to their discussion. Having one explicit key concept in part (a) – gender roles – alongside biological influences and environmental factors allowed students to construct a well-thought-out extended response. The standard this year was particularly good and seemed to suggest a well-prepared cohort for this type of question.

Criterion 1

The broad nature of the question allowed most students to respond in a planned extended response. Strong responses provided a thorough understanding of the overarching question of the two areas of biological and environmental factors, before narrowing their focus upon the specific elements of the question, including stimuli. It is always important that students ensure they can explain, in broad terms, what 'biological influences and environmental factors' means in relation to the overarching question as it creates context to the specifics of the sub-unit. Inaccuracies regarding defining gender role – a key aspect of part (a) was an often being confused with gender stereotypes. Some students did not provide substantive explanations of all concepts, a timely reminder that all terms listed in either part (a) or (b) should be explicitly attended to by students in theory response.

Criterion 7

There was a pleasing use of stimulus material throughout the written responses. Both stimuli offered students the opportunity to explain key concepts and, to some extent, evaluate the question with textual examples. Effective use of the stimuli involved direct quotes and statistical material taken from the stimulus provided. Stronger responses delivered more than just a superficial statement and/or quote, making connections, referring to alternative viewpoints and providing probable explanations.

Stimulus 1 emphasised biological influences providing a foundation for a discussion of numerous aspects of biological theory, as well as research. Strong responses used a number of sound studies to discuss and evaluate the role of biology as a variable, with ideas of brain differentiation, hormones and genetics. Whereas Stimulus 2 primarily focussed upon an aspect of environmental influence which was helpful to students in accommodating a discussion on the development of gender identity. Weaker responses often did not go any further than mentioning the title and a broad statement of each stimulus.

Most students crafted responses with a pleasing range of theoretical perspectives. Often their arguments offered at least two or more theories for each “side” of the argument, the more adept students allowing space for well-reasoned observations, analysis and empirical evidence. The following list are examples of research provided by students:

Hines (2001)
Gilligan (2021)
Sears (2017)
Lewis (1972)
Halpern (2004)
Scantlebury (2014)
Fagot (1985)
Rippon (2018)
Dabbs (1995)
Slaby and Fey (1975)
Thompson and Zerbino (1995)
Condry and Condry (1976)
Voyer (1995)
Ingalhalikar (2014)
Smith and Lloyd (1978)
Verma (2014)
Ruble (2007)
Maccoby and Jacklin (1974)
Hoffman (1989)
Lytton and Romney (2016)
Alexander (2009)
Harasty (1997)
Baron-Cohen (1997)
Janowsky (1994)
Kimura (1997)

Question 2: Intelligence (204 candidates)

Overall comments

The question this year was a little different to previous years, as it did not explicitly refer to theories or measurement of intelligence. However, the question offered significant opportunities for candidates to respond in many ways, providing candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate a wide range of theories and concepts. The stimulus items were well used to cue students to focus on nature/nurture, with stronger students positioning this within the larger picture of defining and measuring intelligence, while other candidates cut ‘straight to the chase’ and focused entirely on the evidence for genetic and environmental contributions in determining intelligence. This meant that there was generally a strong focus on the ‘nature-nurture’ issue which was a positive since this is the crux of the module. Candidates were rewarded for what they knew and were not penalised if they did not include theories and measurements. Strong candidates were able to cover both and place less emphasis on theories, and more emphasis on nature/nurture.

Criterion 1

Many candidates focused on the nature-nurture issue rather than the theories of intelligence, structuring their responses to define intelligence, outline theories (Spearman, Gardner, Sternberg), and explain IQ measurement. Stronger responses analysed genetic and environmental evidence, critiqued twin/adoption studies, and discussed the interactionist view. They linked concepts like reaction range, intellectual potential, and heritability, and explained that environments range from deprived to enriched, viewing them as a spectrum. Some confusion existed around 'heritability' versus 'heredity' and the types of environments.

The Flynn Effect was clarified as an increase in IQ scores, not overall intelligence, with Flynn noting that people are getting better at what IQ tests measure, not necessarily smarter. This distinction is important to avoid misconceptions about historical intelligence levels. Given the sensitivity of the unit, it is crucial to provide specific and accurate explanations, as societal judgments about intelligence can have significant implications.

Criterion 7

The stimuli encouraged a strong focus on evidence, which is often a weak area. Almost all candidates cited at least one type of evidence and used both stimuli. Weaker candidates relied heavily on the stimulus items, while most related Stimulus 2 to Bouchard and McGue's twin/adoption study, citing correlation data and positioning it within discussions of genetic and environmental influences. Stronger candidates linked this evidence to other research, critiquing the study for placing adopted twins in similar environments and discussing the stability of IQ as evidence for genetic contributions compared to transient environmental influences. The Flynn Effect was cited as evidence of environmental influence, with stronger candidates noting that it includes factors like better nutrition and education and clarifying that it cannot be explained by genetic evolution.

Reaction range was often used in the interactionist argument, with data from Stimulus 1 demonstrating environmental impacts. Some candidates linked this to Scarr and Turkheimer's work on socioeconomic status and IQ. Weaker candidates discussed the stimulus at length without linking it to other research, while stronger students used examples like Stern's Rubber Band theory. Stronger responses defined genetic and environmental influences before discussing them with research evidence. Environmental arguments often drew on examples like 'Genie – the Wild Child' or 'Oxana Malaya – Dog Girl', but stronger responses included a variety of studies, such as transracial adoption studies and pre- and post-natal condition studies, providing a more comprehensive analysis.

Overall, the trend was for a stronger focus on evidence than has been the case in previous years, which was no doubt driven by the question, the stimuli presented, and the concepts specified for discussion.

Question 3: Personality (54 candidates)

Overall comment

Fewer students attempted to answer the Personality question than either the Intelligence or Gender questions.

Candidates who were well-prepared evaluated how genetic and environmental factors influence personality development, linking theories to the debate over genetics versus environment. Candidates should incorporate supporting evidence, understand key studies, link theories to the nature/nurture debate, discuss environmental factors, avoid repetition and practice critical evaluation.

Criterion 1

Strong responses not only included a good definition of personality to begin with but also a clear explanation of the concepts of heredity and environment, as well as the nature/nurture controversy. Students were generally well-prepared for this question and were able to explain and evaluate how genetic and environmental factors influence the development of personality. Stronger responses were those that not only explained the various theories of personality development but also demonstrated a clear understanding of how each theory suggested that either genetics or the environment played a significant role in the development of personality. Weaker responses merely summarised the theories of personality without directly answering the question posed, which was to link these theories to the debate over the influence of genetics and environment in explaining personality formation. Likewise, weaker responses spent much of the time re-explaining the stimulus without connecting it to theory in any meaningful way. Some of the stronger responses discussed the impact of factors such as shared versus non-shared environmental factors in accounting for observed differences in personality.

Criterion 7

While most candidates showed a good grasp of the competing personality theories, many responses lacked supporting evidence to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these theories, apart from the stimulus material provided. Students are encouraged to find appropriate research that has been used to test these theories.

Stronger responses were able to link supporting studies to demonstrate how biological research has attempted to investigate a possible biological basis for personality. They considered not only twin studies (such as Bouchard et al., 1990) but also adoption studies (such as Plomin, 1987/8). It is important that students have a clear understanding of, and explain the rationale behind, comparing MZ (monozygotic) and DZ (dizygotic) twins as well as adoption studies. Many candidates merely restated what the stimulus showed, i.e., that there was a difference between MZ and DZ twins in terms of correlations.

Section B: Psychological Processes

Question 4: Perception (219 candidates)

Candidates addressed key concepts of perception but often isolated these principles without linking them to other perceptual principles or stimuli. Students should integrate empirical evidence and research findings, use clear and efficient writing, and correctly incorporate theorists and evidence into their paragraphs.

Criterion 2

Overall, students addressed the main concepts of perception, such as depth and distance cues, perceptual set, and top-down and bottom-up processing. However, many responses isolated these principles without linking them to other perceptual principles or stimuli. Stronger responses integrated Gestalt principles and visual constancy to explain top-down or bottom-up processing and used real-life examples to illustrate pictorial cues. They also discussed the role of perceptual set, including context, past experiences, motivation, emotion, and culture, and linked these to the stimuli provided. Illusions were used to support top-down processing, highlighting cultural differences and supporting theories like Gregory's constructivist theory over Gibson's bottom-up approach.

Stronger responses began by outlining the six stages of visual perception, connecting them to Gibson's bottom-up approach and exploring physiological influences on perception. They used images to support their explanations, particularly when analysing illusions. Weaker responses often focused on the stimulus content without linking it to other research, while stronger responses provided a comprehensive analysis, including the strengths and limitations of bottom-up and top-down processing, and used Neisser's Perceptual Cycle theory to summarise both arguments.

Criterion 7

Most candidates referenced Stimulus 1 and 2 but often restated the material without explaining how it supports concepts. To improve, students should include empirical evidence and research findings to support their explanations, such as studies by Minturn and Bruner, and provide years in references for credibility. Clear and efficient writing enhances responses, and students should integrate theorists and evidence correctly into their paragraphs.

Stronger responses analysed Stimulus 2 with examples, such as how personal experiences with plane crashes from movies or TV shows influence perception. They provided empirical evidence for all elements of perceptual set and linked studies like Hubel and Weisel's feature detector cells or Gibson and Walk's study to bottom-up processing. Additionally, they used illusions to demonstrate Gestalt principles or pictorial depth cues, explaining how this evidence supports either bottom-up or top-down processing perspectives. For example, the Müller-Lyer illusion was used to highlight cultural differences, and the Ponzo illusion was discussed in terms of pictorial depth cues. By incorporating these elements, students can create more sophisticated and well-supported responses.

Question 5: Consciousness (189 candidates)

Answers were varied in content and length. Many students struggled to structure this answer. Some tried to make it an essay, spending time on an introduction and conclusion that wasted time. Better answers started with definitions of consciousness, NWC and ASC, which was a good start.

A few students did both purpose of sleep and dream theories which meant that they took from part (a) or only did each briefly. When given this option, it is better to do one well in the time given.

Criterion 2

One of the key strengths across responses was the widespread ability to define key terms such as Normal Waking Consciousness (NWC) and Altered States of Consciousness (ASC). High-scoring papers accurately described NWC as a state of heightened awareness and attention, using stimulus material to explain brainwave patterns characterised by beta activity. Strong responses elaborated on the stages of NREM and REM sleep, detailing specific brainwave patterns and their implications for human functioning. Many students discussed the characteristics of NWC compared to ASC, including attention, automatic and controlled processes, and provided real-life examples. The cocktail party phenomenon was often cited as evidence for selective attention, though not always applied well.

However, weaker papers often failed to engage deeply with Stimulus 2, particularly in discussions of dream theory and restorative sleep. Many candidates did not critically engage with methods for measuring consciousness, such as EEG and EOG, or explain how these tools provide insight into different states of consciousness. Stronger responses included empirical evidence and detailed explanations, linking theories to stimulus material and using examples like the Müller-Lyer illusion to highlight cultural differences. They also explained how brainwaves in REM are similar to NWC but did not always use EOG specifically.

Overall, while candidates demonstrated a solid grasp of foundational knowledge, they are encouraged to move from descriptive to analytical writing to improve their responses.

Criterion 7

When providing evidence, it is crucial for candidates to explain how it supports their argument and avoid name-dropping irrelevant researchers. Applying measurements to NREM stages and REM effectively shows what happens during sleep. Many missed the opportunity to connect evidence from Stimulus 2 to the restoration theory, making their discussions less relevant. While most candidates used the stimulus, stronger responses applied the information well, rather than just referring to or quoting it without acknowledgment. Some effectively used the graph, considering the placement of REM and sleepwalking, and used the information below the graph to inform their answers.

A common trend was the inclusion of multiple sleep and/or dream theories without sufficient depth. For instance, many candidates mentioned Freud's wish-fulfillment theory, Hobson and McCarley's activation-synthesis theory, and Cartwright's problem-solving theory but provided only brief summaries rather than in-depth evaluations and supporting research. Another area of weakness was the limited use of Stimulus 2 in evaluating theories. While some candidates referenced the stimulus to discuss the importance of REM and NREM sleep, few connected this to the emotional regulation function of REM sleep, as suggested by Walker's research.

Section C: Human Learning

Question 6: Conditioning (363 candidates)

Overall comment

A large cohort of students undertook this question. Overall, the length and depth of responses demonstrated sound understanding of this topic area and its related concepts. Many students explained, with reasonable rigour, the elements, processes, and real-life applications of the process of conditioning, often in a combined extended response. Stronger responses provided a balanced discussion of both types of conditioning, whereas weaker responses tended to focus on describing only one, without a balanced approach.

Criterion 3

Most responses demonstrated sound understanding of the core concepts, principles, processes, and elements of conditioning learning, although it is noted that there was a greater familiarity with Classical Conditioning amongst the responses provided. Key terms and concepts were defined with sufficient detail. Stronger responses discussed a wide range of concepts as they related to the question, using both material from the stimuli and their own. The effective use of the stimuli to support the explanation of the conditioning learning process was evident in most responses, with a slight emphasis on Stimulus 1 and relative classical conditioning processes, and response weaknesses around the explanation and application of Shaping (found in Stimulus 2). Although with that said, both the stimuli afforded students with opportunities to explore and apply related concepts, especially the concepts outlined in part (a) of the question. The scope of the question allowed students to explain and expand upon concept knowledge using the stimuli with effect. Overall, stronger responses to this question effectively addressed part (b) of the question and evaluated the role that conditioning plays in human learning by:

- discussing multiple applications or treatments based on conditioning learning, such as systematic desensitisation or graduated exposure, flooding, and aversive therapy; and/or

- discussing the benefits/strengths and limitations/criticisms of each type of conditioning learning; and/or
- evaluating the studies and/or the applications/therapies

Criterion 7

Overall, both stimulus items were engaged in a thoughtful manner and often used as an effective 'springboard' from which to explain concepts related to the process of conditioning. Students provided sound responses that identified and applied key terms, on the most part accurately, and endeavoured to extend their analysis with relevant research and real-life application. Many students provided research evidence that went beyond the classic studies, only briefly mentioning animal research with the focus primarily upon human studies. Students found that the explanation of application and therapeutic approaches was the best way to provide support for evaluation and critical thinking; the inclusion of real-life applications provided a sophisticated understanding of the theoretical approaches. Weaker responses maintained a focus upon the retelling of Pavlov, Skinner, Watson and Rayner.

Stronger responses referred to multiple empirical evidence/studies with confidence, clarity, accuracy, and relevance. The following list are examples of research provided by students:

- Sue, Sue, and Sue (2006) – flooding using elevator
- Allyon and Azrin (1968) – token economy in prison to improve behaviour
- Cohen and Fillipzac (1971) – token economy
- Miller (1972, 1976) – token economy in share-housing to reduce rent
- Mowrer (1947, 1960) – two-factor learning theory
- Bernstein (1978) – learned taste aversions in chemo patients
- Cover-Jones (1924) – counterconditioning, Peter, and the Rabbit
- Azrin and Foxx (1971) – operant conditioning toilet-training
- Wickes (1938) – conditioning treatment for bedwetting
- Wolpe (1958) – systematic desensitisation / graduated exposure (hierarchy of fears)
- Stampfl (1975) – flooding therapy
- Weins and Menustik (1983) – aversion to drinking alcohol
- Matson and Ollendick (1977) – shaping and toilet-training
- Guthrie (1966) – one-trial learning (phobias)
- Seligman (1972) – learned helplessness.

Question 6: Social Cognitive Learning (54 candidates)

Only one-eighth of the candidates responded to this question and many of the answers were poorly written. Overall, students confidently addressed observational learning, often citing Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment, but many did not detail the term 'models' or its significance. Key elements of latent learning and vicarious conditioning were frequently omitted. Stronger responses included detailed explanations of Köhler's insight learning and Harlow's learning set experiments. Candidates should integrate empirical evidence, provide clear writing, and correctly incorporate theorists and evidence into their responses.

Criterion 3

In part (a) of the paper the term 'models' was not explained in detail by candidates, most answers cited the term in passing when explaining observational learning, without any reference to its important role or status it might have in relation to the child (in Stimulus 1).

Candidates who had difficulty explaining the key processes of observational learning often chose to omit the key elements of latent learning.

The importance of the various aspects of vicarious conditioning, vicarious reinforcement and punishment was cited by relatively few candidates when explaining the social learning theory. When it came to supporting evidence for the Social Learning Theory, the Suzuki Model of teaching the violin to young children was cited by several candidates, together with a step-by-step explanation as to teaching method.

Köhler was cited by the majority of answers in relation to Insight learning, with stronger answers recalling the key elements and explaining Köhler's experiment in detail. Few answers described learning as a cognitive process in relation to Harlow's (1949) who referred to the term as a 'learning set'. These candidates went on to describe the Harlow experiment with rhesus monkeys and their progressive efficiency in solving two-choice discrimination problems.

Candidates may be reluctant to go into lengthy explanations as to Tolman's, Köhler's and Harlow's (1949) experiments as they are heavily reliant on animal studies and the teachers place such emphasis on human learning.

Criterion 7

In part (a) of the examination paper most students were confident when addressing observational learning with most quoting Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment as well as the Bandura, Ross and Ross experiment. Some candidates explained the key elements of observational learning without relating them to Bandura's experiment while others were confident in relating the elements step by step to Stimulus 1.

Many students' explanations of latent learning relied heavily on the stimulus material with several just reiterating the material. Stronger answers explained the Tolman experiment with the rats and related the rats' behaviour to the key elements of latent learning. Newman and Newman's (1981) study was quoted in some answers as a human study in relation to latent learning.

Stimulus 2 provided material for the weaker answers with some candidates identifying the term 'cognitive maps' and successfully relating it to them to the Tolman experiment.