



Student Performance Q&A: 2001 AP® Psychology Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Faculty Consultant regarding the 2001 free-response questions for AP Psychology. *They are intended to assist AP workshop consultants as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also included. Consultants are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

Question 1

What was intended by the question?

This question required the student to discuss a cause and a treatment for a particular behavioral problem based on different perspectives. This question was straightforward in that the four perspectives are discussed in the chapter on “Treatment of Psychological Disorders” in probably every introductory textbook, and all but the Biological perspective are listed in Content Area XIII of the *AP Psychology Course Description*. Additionally, one or more of these perspectives are discussed in other chapters, such as “History and Approaches” (Content Area I), Biological Bases of Behavior (Content Area III), Learning (Content Area VI), and Personality (Content Area X). In other words, these perspectives should have been covered well in an AP Psychology course.

How well did the students perform?

Overall, students did not have a difficult time with this question. Most of the terms were familiar to the students. The student was required to describe a cause and to prescribe a treatment for anxiety based on four well-known psychological perspectives. The use of appropriate psychological terms was important.

What were the common errors or omissions?

A common error was to use general terminology. For example, in discussing a behavioral cause the student needed to use learning terms, such as classical conditioning, operant conditioning, positive reinforcement, modeling, etc. It was not sufficient to write “anxiety is learned.” Likewise, the treatment should involve the description of a particular behavioral method, such as systematic desensitization, extinction, counter conditioning, or others. To receive full credit, the student should have used appropriate psychological terms for each part of the question.

Question 2

What was intended by the question?

Students were required to generalize their knowledge about expectancy and set to different content areas or situations and to apply knowledge in a novel way. Application of knowledge across content areas requires a higher level of understanding in order to do well on this type of question.

How well did the students perform? What were the common errors or omissions?

Some students were not familiar with the key concepts of expectancy or set. While students may have had some knowledge of expectations or expectancies from common knowledge, it was hard to apply this knowledge in the psychological context. Even if students were familiar with expectancy or set in one area of psychology they often had a hard time applying this concept to the other fields of psychology.

Suggestions to improve student performance on the exam

The single most important suggestion that should be relayed to students is that they should use appropriate psychological terms in their answers as frequently as possible. Good anecdotes or examples of research are also useful for clarifying and supporting a point. AP students should be able to give explanations using a language that is different from those who have not taken an AP Psychology course.