



Student Performance Q&A: 2002 AP[®] Psychology Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader regarding the 2002 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. Readers 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?

The intention of Question 1 was to illustrate how some concepts — in this case, opposing tendencies — apply across different content areas of psychology. This question required students to show the relationships between this concept and others. They had to apply what they knew about several concepts rather than merely regurgitating facts or definitions.

How well did students perform?

The modal score for Question 1 was lower than the modal score for question 2; however, the mean scores for the two questions were not markedly different. Although the mean scores may seem somewhat low, both questions did a good job of discriminating the prepared students from those who were less prepared. In addition, the correlation between both free-response questions with the multiple-choice questions was high.

What were common errors or omissions?

There weren't any specific errors or omissions.

Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?

In the past, one of the free-responses questions has often been a question about methodology. One reason for this is that the free-response question format is appropriate for questions about research methods. The other reason is that in the beginning of the AP Psychology Exam, we wanted to stress the importance of the science of psychology. There was evidence that it was neglected in high school courses before the AP Psychology course. I believe there is less concern about that issue today. Therefore, teachers should not expect that there will be a "methods" question on every exam nor should they prepare their students based on patterns that they may have observed

from past exams. Teachers and students should also realize that a student need not answer every part of a question correctly to have performed well on the exam. Students do not have to get every answer correct in order to receive a score of 5. Almost inevitably, there will be something on the exam that a teacher did not cover in class. The teacher should use each exam as a learning experience and avoid the fallacy of criticizing a question because a teacher does not teach it in high school. Teachers must remember that the AP Exam is a college standard.

Question 2

What was intended by the question?

The purpose of Question 2 was to measure primarily knowledge in the developmental content area, an area where we have not had many free-response questions.

How well did students perform?

See above.

What were common errors or omissions?

Same as above.

Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?

See above.