



AP[®] Psychology 2005 Scoring Commentary

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Question 1

Overview

The intent of this question was not only to provide broad coverage of specified content in introductory psychology but to challenge students a bit more than in the past by increasing the cognitive level of the free-response questions. Rather than simply require a definition of eight concepts, as students might have expected from past practices, Question 1 asked students to provide examples of those concepts, thereby demonstrating a higher-order ability to apply psychology terminology. The committee purposefully selected terms to represent a full range of discrimination, including easy, medium, and more challenging terms; however, based on student performance, the question may have been perceived as harder than the committee intended in design.

Sample: 1A

Score: 7

Point 1 was earned because the student provides a specific example of the afterimage effect leading to a misperception. The student describes a person staring at a blue-red flag, and then looking away to a blank area and perceiving (seeing an afterimage of) a green-yellow flag. The student accurately uses opponent process theory of color vision in the explanation. Point 2 was earned because the student provides a solid example of an availability heuristic leading to misperception. The student notes that plane crashes are dramatic events that leave “dominant” memories that are “easily retrieved.” This may lead someone to overestimate the frequency of plane crashes. Point 3 was earned because the essay details a shared cultural misperception and an improper judgment made by Nazis as they “perceived themselves as better than all the other races,” which is a clear example of ethnocentrism. Point 4 was earned because the student identifies an instance in the Kennedy administration where “everyone claimed they gave in to the affirmative opinion of the other people.” As a result of this groupthink, a “flawed plan” was approved. Point 5 was not earned because the student provides an example of a child’s misperception caused by a lack of conservation, not by a lack of object permanence. Point 6 was earned. In describing an inaccurate conclusion resulting from nonrandom assignment, the student illustrates an experiment where a researcher is studying the effects of tea on memory. Two groups are used for the experiment; the researcher administers tea to an AP class and water to a “regular class.” The AP class performed better on a subsequent memory test, and the researcher concludes that tea helps memory. The student notes that this conclusion is wrong because the AP class may have had better memorization skills in the first place. Point 7 was earned. The student describes a musician who “attributes his poor performances in concerts to a lack of practice, even though he practices many hours a day.” (Lack of practice would be an *unstable* cause of poor concert performance.) The student comments that the musician’s “optimistic explanatory style” can lead to a “false conclusion.” He thinks he can improve with practice, but in reality, he may “simply lack musical talent.” (Lack of musical talent would be a *stable* cause of poor concert performance.) The student further comments that the musician’s optimistic explanatory style (a permanent attributional style) may prevent him “from moving on to areas where he is more suited.” Point 8 was earned by describing how “proactive interference contributes to inaccurate cognition.” The student describes two learning tasks (lists to remember) and notes that the memory of the first list interferes with the ability to remember items on the second list.

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Question 1 (continued)

Sample: 1B

Score: 4

The essay earned point 1. It gives an example of a misperception due to a sensory experience, and a specific afterimage is described (“when a person stares at a red spot and looks away he or she will see an after-image of green”). Point 2 was earned. The example describes information that is readily available and indicates an incorrect prediction based on this knowledge: “a woman might be terrified of planes because of her knowledge of plane crashes based on disaster movies . . . despite the greater likeliness of a car crash.” Point 3 did not earn credit because there is no attempt to answer. The essay earned point 4. It notes the “Bay of Pigs decision” as an example and suggests that dissent was actively suppressed to the point where advisors did not voice their concerns. Point 5 was earned because the student provides an identification of an object viewed by a child and indicates that the child “incorrectly assumes that when he can’t see an object anymore it no longer exists.” Point 6 was not earned because the essay does not provide a specific example of nonrandom assignment. Instead, it simply states that a researcher who “fails to randomly assign test subjects . . . is working under biased conditions.” Point 7 was not awarded because no relevant example is given. Point 8 did not earn credit because there is no attempt to answer.

Sample: 1C

Score: 1

Point 1 did not earn credit. The essay provides an example of a free-recall exercise, not the afterimage effect. Point 2 was not awarded. The student states that “a rule of thumb . . . is not always accurate” but does not provide an example of specific, incorrect perception, cognition, or conclusion. Point 3 did not earn credit because there is no attempt to address ethnocentrism. Point 4 was not awarded because the student does not acknowledge a group’s desire for harmony or the group’s failure to acknowledge reasonable alternatives in an incorrect decision. Point 5 earned credit because the essay correctly describes a lack of object permanence as resulting in a child’s misconception that a ball that has rolled under a couch has “disappeared [*sic*] into thin air” and “no longer exists.” The essay did not receive credit for point 6 because it gives an example of a biased sampling procedure, not nonrandom assignment. Point 7 was not earned. The essay provides a contradictory “pass the class/fail the class” example and offers no personal attributional classification for a teacher’s style of explanation for class performance. Point 8 was not earned. The student describes proactive interference as a “disturbance” but does not demonstrate a comprehension of the concept through a valid example of an incorrect perception resulting from this memory-related phenomenon.

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Question 2

Overview

This question was designed to move the cognitive challenge beyond application to evaluation/judgment and require students to develop their ideas in greater depth. The question presented three controversies in psychology: the nature of language acquisition, hypnosis, and diagnostic labeling. Students had to identify the two sides of each controversy and then select a side to advocate based on the quality of evidence. Initially, development of the scoring guidelines emphasized research citation, but the scoring guidelines team broadened the guidelines to provide points for use of general principles. In addition, the general format allowed for students to defend a point of view that synthesized the two positions where appropriate, instead of advocating solely for one as stipulated in the question. The three controversies were selected from diverse areas in psychology, addressed both depth and breadth in psychology, and allowed students to demonstrate more sophisticated ability in weighing the nature of psychological evidence.

Sample: 2A

Score: 8

Point 1 was earned. In the first paragraph, the student argues that by having a label, a psychiatrist or psychologist can determine the appropriate course of treatment. The essay earned point 2 because the student states that “a false or inaccurate diagnosis” can be harmful. Point 3 earned credit because the student notes that diagnostic labeling helps doctors and patients understand the disorder more effectively. Point 4 was earned because the essay states that “a psychologist who took a ‘learning’ approach would say that the learning of language could be based on rewards and punishments.” Point 5 earned credit because the essay includes a discussion of the “critical period” of language acquisition. Point 6 earned a point. The student describes research that suggests that brain connections are not made if a child is not exposed to language early enough in development. Point 7 was earned because the student describes the theory of altered states of consciousness. The essay earned point 8 because the student describes the theories of role playing and social pressure as the reasons for the “hypnotic trance.” Point 9 did not earn credit because no evidence is provided to support either side of the argument.

Sample: 2B

Score: 6

Point 1 was awarded. In the first paragraph, the student describes how using a label leads to more effective diagnosis and treatment. Point 2 was earned because the essay states that overlapping disorders can be “difficult to label and treat.” Also, some people believe that “labels dehumanize the clients.” Point 3 earned credit because the essay states that “there are many success stories to be found in the annals of psychology.” Point 4 was awarded because the student describes language as possibly being learned through “reinforcement and modeling.” The essay earned point 5 because the student refers to “a language acquisition device,” which seems to be hardwired, or inborn. Point 6 was awarded. The student does not explicitly refer to a critical period but does provide sufficient information to demonstrate an understanding of the concept when he or she notes that “Language learning is a complex process.” Points 7 and 8 were not awarded because the student does not provide any evidence either in support of or against hypnosis as a psychological phenomenon. Point 9 was not earned because no evidence is provided to support a perspective that hypnosis is or is not a viable concept in psychology.

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Question 2 (continued)

Sample: 2C

Score: 2

Points 1 and 2 did not earn credit because there is no attempt to describe the advantages of diagnostic labeling. Point 3 was not awarded because there is no attempt to support a point of view with respect to the advantages and/or disadvantages of diagnostic labeling. Point 4 was awarded because the student says that children can “acquire language skills through example as well as experience.” Point 5 was not awarded because there is no attempt to describe a child’s predisposition to learn language, nor is there acknowledgment of biology or neurology. Point 6 did not earn credit because there is no attempt to provide evidence in favor of the nature or nurture view of language acquisition. Point 7 was not earned because there is no attempt to describe hypnosis as a divided state of consciousness. Point 8 was not earned because there is no attempt to describe hypnosis as a social phenomenon. Point 9 was earned because the student describes how a placebo effect/anticipation of results can affect the outcome of hypnosis.