



Student Performance Q&A: 2010 AP® Psychology Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2010 free-response questions for AP® Psychology were written by the Chief Reader, Kenneth D. Keith of the University of San Diego. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, 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 provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

This question had a twofold intent. First, the subject matters of the various points required demonstration of knowledge across several subfields of the discipline (memory, problem solving, research methods, learning, biological psychology). Second, within each point the question required students to apply critical conceptual thought to show the relation between the members of each pair of psychological terms.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.58 out of a possible 7 points, with a standard deviation of 1.80. Responses covered the entire range of scores.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students had some difficulty connecting the concepts of operant conditioning and superstition. Although this knowledge is reasonably basic, articulating the relation between these terms proved challenging.

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

Consistent with other years, responses to this year's exam suggest the importance of clarifying the components of operant conditioning. In particular, the distinction between contingent and noncontingent consequences should be made clear.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question required analysis and application. Students were asked to relate concepts from several subfields of psychology (social, visual perception, memory, biological) to behavior and perception in an applied scenario.

How well did students perform on this question?

This question proved slightly less difficult than Question 1. The mean score was 3.23 out of a possible 7 points, with a standard deviation of 1.84. As with Question 1, responses covered the entire range of scores.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students experienced difficulty earning the point requiring application of the cocktail party effect.

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

Teachers seem to emphasize visual perception in their lesson plans, but student performance on this question reinforces the need to include coverage of other facets of perception as well.