



Student Performance Q&A: 2011 AP® Psychology Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2011 free-response questions for AP® Psychology were written by the Chief Reader, Ken 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 required students to understand key features of experimental design and analysis and to apply visual and cognitive terms to a specific research study. In part A students were asked to identify the independent and dependent variables used in the study. Independent and dependent variables are crucial aspects of experimental design. In part B they were required to explain how principles of sensation and perception contribute to information processing. More specifically they were expected to identify the roles of foveal vision, feature detectors and the Gestalt principle of closure in the context of the study. Part C required students to understand the importance of random assignment and statistical significance in drawing conclusions from the research data.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.46 out of a possible 7 points. Students' scores covered the entire range of possible scores.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Among the most common errors were those associated with the research methods concepts, especially statistical significance and random assignment.

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?

Basic research methods remain important to the teaching of AP Psychology, and this year's exam performance would suggest that teachers may not be placing as much emphasis as they might on

topics they may see as a bit more advanced or specialized, such as statistical significance and random assignment.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question required students to apply psychological concepts to a scenario describing how a high school student, Savannah, is learning Japanese. Savannah is preparing for an exam that requires written and spoken responses in Japanese. Students were asked to describe how certain aspects of language, learning and cognition affect Savannah's abilities and perceptions. In part A they were required to describe how each of the following relates to Savannah's success in learning or performance: Broca's area, the use of phonemes, modeling and chunking. Part B assessed students' understanding of the roles of encoding and age in language acquisition, and part C evaluated their ability to apply the concepts of self-efficacy and confirmation bias.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 3.58 out of a possible 8 points. Students' scores covered the entire range of possible scores.

What were common student errors or omissions?

The most common difficulty encountered by students in their response to this question was an inability to apply knowledge to the problems posed by the question.

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?

Stress not only rote or definitional knowledge of terminology and concepts, but also critical application of knowledge to real and hypothetical situations.