

Psychology

2005 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Science Learning Area

SSABSA
SENIOR SECONDARY ASSESSMENT
BOARD OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SACE
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
CERTIFICATE OF
EDUCATION

PSYCHOLOGY

2005 ASSESSMENT REPORT

GENERAL COMMENTS

This is the second year in which Psychology has been assessed as a SACE subject. The enrolment has doubled to around 1200. The mean score for the examination was 59.6% which compares favourable with the 2004 examination which was 61.3%

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 1: COLLABORATIVE INVESTIGATION

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 2: INDIVIDUAL INVESTIGATION

These two components (i.e. Collaborative Investigation and Individual Investigation) were centrally moderated according to SSABSA's requirements, policies, and procedures. Samples of both types of students' investigations were submitted by schools. All grade bands were sampled. Since assessments of student performance vary from teacher to teacher, the purpose of moderation is to make a comparison across schools of the marking standards of teachers. This procedure ensures fairness to students and provides the wider community with reliable information about student performance.

Moderators are a trained panel of teachers and academics. Small groups of three or four moderators assessed the samples. Membership of the groups was changed on a regular basis so that the standards set during the training period were maintained.

The most popular SSABSA-approved research programs were 'Sleep' and 'Persuasion'. The least popular were 'Self-Improvement', 'Chunking in Learning', and 'Stereotyping'.

Generally, it was found that marking was too generous. Literacy was adequate, but the use of psychological terms and the understanding and use of statistical terms from the curriculum statement were often deficient.

There are a number of issues related to the marks scheme that need to be brought to the attention of teachers:

- Some students provided information in their discussion that should have appeared in the introduction and, hence, their reports lacked clarity.
- Some students had difficulty expressing their intentions (i.e. what part of the data they were going to use and how it will address the questions or hypothesis). Other students did not explain how the data were to be used at all. Teachers should note that a presentation of results is not necessarily the same thing as a demonstration of investigation skills.
- Students should be encouraged to keep their investigations simple by posing a simple question/hypothesis. Sophisticated analysis of data pertaining to a simple question or hypothesis can gain full marks. There is no need to use all the data generated from the SSABSA-approved research program.
- It is often advisable to use graphs (e.g. histograms) to illustrate patterns in the data rather than to use scatter-plots since relationships in scatter-plots are difficult to detect visually if one or both variables have a small range of values.

Most of these problems should be detected and addressed by teachers at the proposal stage.

It is advised that (i) proposals be attached to the investigation, (ii) students list ethical issues that directly apply to the investigation rather than those of a more generic nature, (iii) raw data be included in the appendix of the investigation, and (iv) teachers read and refer to 'Conducting Collaborative and Individual Investigations' in the Support Materials section of the SSABSA website.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 4: EXAMINATION

SECTION A: SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

In general, 2 marks are allocated for one well-expressed piece of information. Questions that require an explanation are worth 4 marks and therefore, in order to obtain full marks, students must supply two relevant and connected pieces of information.

The examination setters aimed to produce short-answer questions that varied in difficulty from straightforward easily reproduced knowledge through to knowledge that required skills of critical understanding, problem-solving, and/or application of psychological principles. The mean mark for each question in section A is shown in the table below.

| Question | Mean Mark | Maximum Mark | Mean Mark (%) |
|----------|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| 1 | 0.74 | 2 | 37.2 |
| 2 | 1.12 | 2 | 55.9 |
| 3 | 3.41 | 4 | 85.3 |
| 4 | 0.83 | 2 | 41.3 |
| 5 | 3.39 | 4 | 84.8 |
| 6 | 4.99 | 6 | 83.1 |
| 7 | 2.50 | 4 | 62.4 |
| 8 | 1.27 | 2 | 63.50 |
| 9 | 1.09 | 2 | 54.5 |
| 10 | 3.04 | 4 | 76.0 |
| 11 | 1.40 | 2 | 70.1 |
| 12 | 1.16 | 2 | 58.0 |
| 13 | 3.19 | 4 | 79.7 |
| 14 | 2.12 | 4 | 53.1 |
| 15 | 3.48 | 4 | 87.0 |
| 16 | 2.42 | 4 | 60.6 |
| 17 | 2.08 | 4 | 52.1 |
| 18 | 3.33 | 4 | 83.4 |
| 19 | 3.00 | 4 | 74.9 |
| 20 | 2.81 | 4 | 70.3 |
| 21 | 0.98 | 2 | 48.8 |
| 22 | 1.23 | 2 | 61.4 |
| 23 | 1.11 | 2 | 56.0 |
| 24 | 1.52 | 2 | 76.0 |
| 25 | 2.19 | 4 | 54.7 |

Overall, the standard of English, in terms of communication, was high. In addition, the legibility of writing was generally very good.

Question 1

This question requiring a description of one advantage of using the Delphi technique had the lowest mean in Section A. Some students described differences between the Delphi technique and focus groups, rather than providing an *advantage* of the former.

Question 2

This question requiring a description of one difference between experimental investigations and quantitative observational investigations was not particularly well answered. Some students suggested incorrectly that most quantitative observational investigations took place without the participants' knowledge, or that quantitative observational investigations cannot be used to answer a specific question, but rather as a general 'fishing expedition' for facts. Other students suggested that experiments could take place only in a laboratory.

Question 3

The majority of students answered this question well, showing an ability to identify the limitations in a small unrepresentative sample.

Question 4

This question, requiring a description of one example of a subjective quantitative measure, was not answered very well in many cases. Most students responded with short answers such as 'Likert Scale', but without elaborating further.

Question 5

- (a) The majority of students correctly calculated the mean for the given distribution of scores.
- (b) The median score of the distribution was also calculated correctly by most students.

Question 6

The majority of students answered this question about ethical issues well. Some problems occurred when students tried to separate issues such as 'informed consent' into two (or even three) separate answers.

Question 7

Most students used the 'ABC model' to explain the structure of attitudes, and generally described it well. Some students thought that the 'A' in the acronym 'ABC' represented the word 'Attitude' instead of the word 'Affective'. Others referred to the 'A, B and C' as if these were ordered components, and referred to affective components affecting behaviour, which affected cognition.

Question 8

Some students answered this question as if it were a continuation of the previous question, while others referred simply to 'behaviour', associating this with the influence of attitudes on behaviour.

Question 9

This question, requiring a description of one factor that affects people's attitudes, was not answered very well in many cases. Some students described the effects that direct experience, exposure or learning had on their lives rather than describing a factor. Others simply named the processes without *describing* them. Other students answered this question as if it were about attitude change/persuasion.

Question 10

Overall, both parts of this question were answered well by most students. While a simple indication of direction was all that was required for this question, some students referred to the direction as being either 'positive' or 'negative', seeming to refer to whether the behaviour was considered beneficial or not.

Question 11

Most students answered this question about gaining self-knowledge from social comparison well. Many students answered this question either partially or completely as is it related to observational learning. Some did this very overtly by referring to observational learning in their answers, while others referred to gaining skills through watching sporting heroes and using the same 'moves' later.

Question 12

Responses to this question about impression formation varied in quality. Problems with this question fell into the basic category of perspective. Many students referred to the actor's actions in impression management rather than Lili's cognition in impression formation. More accomplished students referred to Lili's decoding of the cues that were presented by the actor.

Question 13

Most students answered this question well, providing good descriptions of two examples of how to use impression management to make a favourable impression. The main problems encountered with this question occurred when answers were overly broad in scope (thus not truly giving examples of how impression management would be used), or the suggested actions were not clearly likely to improve the way in which you would be perceived.

Question 14

While this question asked students to indicate how the competitors (golfer and weightlifter) should *prepare* for a good performance, many answers referred only to what state of arousal the competitors should be in. Some students referred to extremes of arousal which would have been associated with low performance levels (e.g. 'the golfer should have low arousal'). Other students referred to broad goals rather than specific actions of preparation. 'Psych up' was the most common expression of this. Other answers did not give a clear indication that *psychological* arousal would be reached (e.g. the weightlifter should 'go for a jog'). Another problem was that many students seemed to read the x-axis as if it were a timeline, referring to the golfer's arousal as 'starting low, then increasing to a maximum ...'.

Question 15

This question had the highest mean in Section A. An above-average capacity to read and interpret graphs was demonstrated, with students readily picking out and describing two

differences between the sleep pattern of children and the sleep pattern of the elderly in the two graphs provided.

Question 16

This question, which required a description of and one example of a circadian rhythm, was not particularly well answered. Some students discussed 'jet-lag' and 'shift-workers' *as if* they were examples of circadian rhythms. Other students neglected to mention that circadian rhythms had a period of 24 hours, but were able to give examples which reflected this. Some students were under the impression that 24-hour rhythms were only one type of 'circadian' rhythm.

Question 17

Responses to this question about strategies that governments could use to reduce driver fatigue varied in quality. Problems occurred when students either referred to the driver's point of view rather than the government's (e.g. 'drink coffee'), gave broad answers which did not really constitute a strategy (e.g. 'encourage people to drink coffee') or gave answers in which the government's role was unclear or unlikely. Some students incorrectly used the terms 'micro sleep' and 'power nap' interchangeably and thus suggested that the government advertise the advantages of micro sleeps (which would in fact be deadly).

Question 18

Both parts of this question were answered very well by most students. Most students were able to provide one example of a situation in a person's life that could lead to stress, and provided appropriate descriptions of one biological/physiological effect of prolonged stress on a person's health.

Question 19

This question was answered well in most cases. Some students failed to show a breadth of knowledge, as they gave identical or very similar answers for Philip and Jenny. Some students did not provide a strategy that gave specific actions, but instead talked in very broad terms about the general type of activity (e.g. 'relax' or 'have fun').

Question 20

This question was generally very well answered, with the majority of incorrect answers being psychological rather than *biological* symptoms of anxiety.

Question 21

This question, which required a description of one effective psychological treatment for depression, was not particularly well answered. Many students failed to identify the key words 'describe' and 'psychological'. Thus, answers such as 'Cognitive behavioural therapy' (not a *description*) and 'benzodiazepines' (not *psychological*) were common. Other students gave 'common-sense' answers, perhaps covering for a lack of knowledge.

Questions 22, 23 and 24

These questions required students to identify elements within the scenarios and use them to describe influences on an individual's behaviour with respect to different levels of explanation of behaviour. Many students did not respond in the expected way, seeming to make good guesses (i.e. answering intuitively) rather than demonstrating adequate knowledge

of the four levels of explanation of behaviour. The quality and approach of answers was quite varied, with some students feeling the need to invent extra characteristics, behaviour or information about the people listed in order to answer the questions. Better answers clearly made links between the cognitive processes (including specifying manners of learning where appropriate), person types or socio-cultural features listed and the behaviour that the person undertook.

Most students answered the question concerning the socio-cultural level of explanation (question 24) very well, and the question focusing on the person level of explanation was also answered well by most students (question 23). The question directed at the basic processes level of explanation was not answered as well (question 22).

Question 25

Responses to this question about factors that influence resilience varied in quality. The main reasons for lost marks for this question were answers which did not give two different factors that influence resilience (i.e. both answers featured the same factor) or having factors which were very broad and supported by no descriptive detail (e.g. 'life experience').

SECTION B: EXTENDED-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Each extended-response question was marked out of 20, with 16 marks being allocated for content (each well-made point being worth 2 marks) and 4 marks for communication. Both questions in this section of the examination had four content parts, each of which was marked out of 4.

In awarding a communication mark, the following factors were taken into account:

- Is the response structured in the form of fluent and well-organised sentences and paragraphs?
- Does the response contain correct grammar and spelling?
- Does the response explain concepts clearly, using relevant and concise psychological language?

It was noted that some students wrote extended introductions for each of the two questions. Generally, such introductions contained points of information that were taken up in greater detail in subsequent paragraphs. This practice is not an effective use of time, as a point cannot receive marks more than once, regardless of how many times it is stated.

Both of the two extended written response questions appeared to be useful in discriminating between more and less able students, especially question 27, although the section on negative reinforcement in question 26 also proved challenging for most students. Most students stuck to the point of the questions, and use of psychological terms was generally accurate. Although some students obviously struggled to write much for question 27, it appeared that those who had a fair grasp of both topics covered in the extended-response questions had tried to spend a roughly equal amount of time on each.

Question 26

Responses to this question about principles of learning varied in quality, with a mean mark of 53%. The students were divided mainly into two groups: those that answered this question very well and those that had very little idea of learning principles. Most answers included a general definition of punishment, its effects, and the correct example from the scenario. The best answers also included coverage of positive and negative reinforcement, and how this related to what had happened to Bruno. Most students could give the example of punishment

and recognised that the pizza was positive reinforcement, and for a number of students this was the only point for which they received marks for the question. When giving definitions of punishment and reinforcement, many students failed to mention that punishment decreases the frequency of a response and reinforcement increases the frequency of a response. The term ‘aversive stimulus’ appeared to be poorly understood by many students who used it—they seemed to think that the word ‘adverse’ meant the same thing as ‘averse’.

The two factors that influence the effect of punishment caused the most difficulty for students. A number of answers included a discussion on the ethical and practical implications of excessively harsh treatment being meted out. Quite a few students also mentioned the influence that the quality of the relationship between the dispenser of punishment and its recipient might have upon the outcome of the punishment.

The section on positive reinforcement was handled fairly well by most students. As mentioned previously, the section on negative reinforcement proved difficult. Although some students could give a general definition of what it involved, few could find a practical illustration of negative reinforcement from the scenario provided, and even fewer could say that the outcome of this process on Bruno’s father would tend to result in him sending his son to his room more frequently.

Question 27

This question, asking students to discuss conceptions of personality relevant to a case study, had a mean of 46%. Responses varied widely in quality. The wording at the start of the first dot point in this question was a problem for some students who didn’t pick up on the fact that, ‘one trait conception ...’ meant that a specific outline of one conception was required, and not a general discussion about traits. In some cases, it was evident from the responses to the second dot point that students did actually have information that they could have previously used to good effect. Most students readily picked out two of Michelle’s personality traits.

A number of students tried to psychoanalyse Michelle instead of addressing the dot points and describing a trait theory. This was particularly evident in the third part of this question. These students discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Michelle’s personality instead of the strengths and weaknesses of trait conceptions of personality in general. The description of a psychodynamic conception of personality or a humanistic conception of personality was the best answered part of this question. Many students displayed a good grasp of these conceptions and some students did an excellent job of linking these conceptions to Michelle’s personality, even though this was not required in the answer.

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