

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2019 AP[®] Psychology Free-Response Questions

Set 1

• Number of Students Scored	311,215			
• Number of Readers	594			
• Score Distribution		Exam Score	N	%At
		5	63,772	20.5
		4	78,748	25.3
		3	58,189	18.7
		2	41,962	13.5
		1	68,544	22.0
• Global Mean	3.09			

The following comments on the 2019 free-response questions for AP[®] Psychology were written by the Chief Reader, Richard Seefeldt/UW River Falls. 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 preparation 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.

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The responses were expected to demonstrate an understanding of the major components of research methods in terms of an experiment and how specific psychological terminology applies to the scenario. The responses needed to address a psychologist's study of children going door to door asking for candy, and whether the children would take additional candy when they were alone or in a group and masked or not masked. The responses needed to demonstrate understanding of an experiment by identifying the operational definition of the dependent variable, explaining how the data support or do not support the hypotheses, discussing why findings may not be generalizable to a population, and indicating understanding of the differences between a naturalistic observation and an experiment. Additionally, the responses needed to demonstrate knowledge of specific concepts within learning, social psychology, and development by discussing how modeling, deindividuation, and Kohlberg's preconventional stage of morality might have played a role in the children's behavior.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Responses demonstrated a broad range of understanding of concepts in content areas of research methods, learning, social psychology, and development, as students were expected to apply these concepts to the scenario. Responses scored points by clearly applying concepts of operational definition, data for hypotheses, generalization, naturalistic observation, modeling, deindividuation, and preconventional morality.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Commonly missed points in this question included the misidentification of the dependent variable, as responses often referred to the children themselves or the candy instead of the percent of children taking additional candy. Additionally, responses often missed the correct application of deindividuation, indicating a knowledge gap, as they described other terms such as diffusion of responsibility instead of deindividuation.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The operational definition of the dependent variable is the amount of candy taken by the children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The operational definition of the dependent variable is the percentage of children who took additional candy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When in groups, children felt less responsible and took more candy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When in groups, the children might lose their sense of self and take extra candy.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

To improve student performance on the exam teachers should offer a variety of ways to encourage the deep processing of psychological terminology. Simple memorization of terms and definitions will not be enough for students to be able to apply concepts to scenarios, so they should practice application often and in various ways.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Teachers will find example responses from this particular question on AP Central, along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- FRQ practice questions for teachers to use as formative assessment are now available as part of the collection of new resources for teachers for the 2019 school year. These resources begin with scaffolded questions that represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and present an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course. These resources are available on AP Classroom and include the feature that allows specific question types and topics to be searched to find the new collection of FRQ practice questions and their accompanying scoring guidelines.
- Refer to Units 1 (Scientific Foundations of Psychology), 6 (Developmental Psychology), and 9 (Social Psychology) Instructional Approaches and Sample Activities in the 2019 AP Psychology Course and Exam Description.

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This question asked students to apply concepts from several areas of psychology to a real-world scenario. These domains of psychology included social psychology, cognitive psychology, personality theory, developmental psychology, physiological psychology, and human memory. The responses needed to show understanding of the concepts and how they fit with the scenario.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Students had difficulty applying some of the concepts to the scenario. The nature of the psychological concepts varied significantly across points, so students had to show knowledge spanning very different areas. Because of the breadth of the concepts, students regularly responded correctly to some of the concepts, but there were some predictable gaps in student knowledge. In many cases students responded to terms used by laypeople with their everyday meaning rather than with the technical meaning as used by psychologists.

Another problem with student responses was a failure to relate the concepts to the scenario. They frequently identified the concept but did not say how it related to the story.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It appeared that many students did not know the meaning of the word <i>altruism</i>, so they couldn't score the point related to it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students demonstrated understanding by connecting the conceptual definition or description of the concept in a scenario that related the early and later life of the individual described in the question.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students very frequently conceptualized <i>self-efficacy</i> as some form of efficiency rather than understanding its technical definition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students earned the point by applying the concept correctly (i.e., relating a belief in one's competence to an action).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student responses to the concept of <i>self-actualization</i> were often incomplete. They showed a general understanding of the concept, but sometimes did not use the term in the way consistent with the technical meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students earned the point by saying that a person who is self-actualized has reached his or her fullest/peak/maximum potential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students had difficulty differentiating episodic memory (memory of personal events) from factual information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students earned the point by relating memory of a specific event in his life to the scenario in the question by saying that the person remembered a specific event rather than a period in his life.

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

N/A

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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- Refer to Units 2 (Biological Bases for Behavior), 5 (Cognitive Psychology), 7 (Motivation, Emotion, Personality), and 9 (Social Psychology) Instructional Approaches and Sample Activities in the 2019 AP Psychology Course and Exam Description.