2019 Psychology Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the previous year’s assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the Psychology subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Group Investigation

This assessment type requires students to complete at least one group investigation and one individual investigation using SACE approved research programs. Students typically produce two written reports of a maximum of 1500 words each (excluding the 250 word proposal), and are viewed as a set. Students develop proposals, analyse and interpret data to form conclusions, evaluate research approaches and discuss research ethics relevant to the investigation. 2019 was the first year materials were submitted for moderation electronically. Materials for this assessment type were appropriately submitted for moderation.

The more successful responses commonly:

* used two different investigation designs in the set of responses showing a clear difference between each report
* discussed research ethics specific to the investigation
* interpreted results accurately and provided a systematic and in-depth discussion of the evidence leading to the formulation of logical and highly relevant conclusions
* provided evidence to demonstrate initiative in applying constructive and focused approaches to individual and collaborative work
* discussed a range of realistic improvements that were appropriate and provided clear explanations about how each improvement would improve the quality of the findings
* appropriately displayed data, including graphing and table conventions, and in accordance with the intent described in the proposal/introduction
* made small and appropriate changes to the introduction from the proposal, such as tense.

The less successful responses commonly:

* did not include a maximum 250 word proposal, or proposals were inadequate
* provided too much or too little data, or repeated measures of central tendency unnecessarily, making the interpretation of the evidence and ability to form adequate conclusions difficult
* provided data analysis that was not discussed or relevant to the investigation aim (such as calculating standard deviation but not discussing it in the report)
* used inaccurate or inappropriate graphing conventions such as inaccurate scales
* included raw data or calculations in the report unnecessarily
* did not follow SACE approved research programs
* repeated similar and/or generic ideas for both investigations, particularly in the discussion of research ethics and evaluation of the sample used
* exceeded the word count [up to a maximum of 1500 words (excluding the proposal and quantitative and qualitative data)] or provided very brief discussions in sections
* discussed ideas in general terms rather than relating specifically to the particular research program used
* discussed data that did not appear in the result section of the report
* could not clearly differentiate key evaluative terms such as reliability and validity.

Assessment Type 2: Skills and Applications Tasks

The number of tasks typically submitted in this assessment type ranged from five to seven and included a mixture of tests and assignments. This is in accordance with the subject outline, which states that students undertake at least four tasks, with at least two tasks under direct supervision of the teacher. Electronic submission of materials for moderation were easily accessed when all student work for the sample was provided. Teachers need to be aware that when students SATs are double-sided that both sides need to be scanned and submitted.

The more successful responses commonly:

* provided evidence from a range of assessment design criteria and included a range of different tasks, not just tests
* included tasks that allowed students to apply their knowledge to situations
* provided responses that were concise
* appropriately acknowledged information from a wide range of sources and explicitly demonstrated how sources of information have been critically and logically selected in assignments
* provided responses to test questions with a focus on the lead in verb (such as describe, discuss and explain how).

The less successful responses commonly:

* responded to sets of tasks that were only made up of tests with multiple choice type questions
* included tests without an extended response section or similar, limiting the opportunity to demonstrate deep and broad knowledge and understanding
* primarily demonstrated evidence of the knowledge and understanding criteria with limited evidence of the analysis and evaluation and application assessment design criteria
* relied too heavily on previous examination questions, when adapted and/or diverse questions are preferable.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination

The Subject Outline states that the external examination consists of short-answer and extended-response questions. For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning in relation to all four assessment design criteria:

* investigation
* analysis and evaluation
* application
* knowledge and understanding.

It was pleasing to see that many students demonstrated the ability to respond successfully to questions addressing specific features within all four assessment design criteria.

General comments

The first online examination in Psychology was successfully undertaken by the 2019 student cohort. Most students completed the paper, indicating that there were no time constraints.

Many students wrote excessively, not using the marks allocated to the question, or question part, as a guide for the length of response to provide. Students cannot lose marks for lengthy responses, provided that the additional material is relevant, correct, and understandable. However, excessively long responses introduce the possibility of losing marks for additional information which is incorrect. Answers that contain contradictory statements cannot receive full marks. An individual point cannot receive marks more than once, regardless of how many times it is stated.

Teachers should consider how to support students to write responses of an appropriate length in future electronic examinations. One recommendation teachers may provide to students is to use the word count tool, which is visible while students are typing, as their new guide for appropriate response lengths. Students were able to obtain full marks for answering 2-mark questions in about 20 to 25 words. An appropriate guide on word counts for responses should be considered and monitored by teachers and students during the year in preparation for the electronic examination in 2020.

It is also important for students to write clearly to convey understanding. In the subject outline, the expectation that students demonstrate the ability to use appropriate psychological terms in their work is explicit. It has been reported previously that the use of everyday language, rather than psychological terminology, does not demonstrate knowledge of the correct terms which leads to inaccurate answers, and the consequent loss of marks. For full marks, appropriate psychological terms need to be used accurately. Spelling errors were very prevalent in responses and the articulation of ideas was frequently of low quality. Typographical errors may have been the reason for the spelling errors, however it is worth considering if the lengthy responses provided may have been at the expense of quality.

In some questions students are required to analyse information or to apply their knowledge to a scenario (e.g., question 3(a)). Answers that address the theory without application of the theory to the scenario cannot be credited with full marks. When questions are divided into parts, students need to recognise that the answer to each part of the question needs to refer to the opening scenario.

One mark was assigned to questions where an answer was less affected by expression. Such questions generally require students to state, name, or identify information, generating unambiguous answers, which are either right or wrong (e.g. question 2(a)). Questions with more marks require better expression, and students need to understand the meaning of the key verb used in the question, such as describe or explain. When students are asked to describe, it is expected they will write about what happens (e.g. question 3(f)), whereas when asked to explain, it is expected that they will write about why or how something happens (e.g. questions 3(c), (d) and (e)). Students who perform well demonstrate that they understand the distinction between the key verbs used in the questions.

Question 1

Generally, students demonstrated a high level of understanding of attitudes.

In 1(a)(i), students knew that attitudes affect behaviour and behaviour affects attitudes. In very good answers, students gave examples such as: “A positive attitude to a social group could result in a person being friendly to that group; being polite and friendly towards a particular group could result in a more positive attitude towards that group when the polite behaviour was rewarded.”

The more successful responses to 1(a)(ii) included:

* descriptions of the effect of social context in contributing towards inconsistency between attitudes and behaviour

Example: “People change their behaviours to fit in with the social norms or gain social acceptance, in spite of their attitudes.”

* descriptions of weak or ambivalent attitudes contributing to the inconsistency between attitudes and behaviour

Example: “An attitude that has been derived from indirect experience is less likely to be strong, therefore behaviour could be inconsistent with attitude.”

* answers that referred to the specificity of an attitude (e.g. “If an attitude is not specific then the behaviour is more likely to be inconsistent/unpredictable.”) or answers that referred to the accessibility of an attitude (e.g. “The less accessible the attitude, then the less predictable the behaviour is likely to be.”).

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

* discussed the concept of cognitive dissonance in detail, but did not address the question, which asked students to account for the inconsistency LaPiere found between attitude and behaviour.

The more successful responses in 1(b) included:

* identification of the utilitarian/adaptive/instrumental function, and then the application of that function to a particular social group

Example: “The adaptive function of a positive attitude to a social group is to maximise the development of valuable friendships and to minimise loneliness.”

* identification of the expressive function, followed by an explanation.

Example: “The expressive function gives meaning to our lives by allowing us to tell others about ourselves. We express our beliefs by wearing clothing with club or group emblems, or speaking positively to others about particular social groups.”

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

* gave definitions of the functions but omitted to apply the positive attitude function to the social group context.

Question 2

In the more successful responses in 2(a), students identified:

* the unconditioned stimulus as the bee sting
* the conditioned stimulus as the white flowers
* stimulus discrimination as the process of flinching in the presence of white flowers but not brightly coloured flowers
* extinction as the result of Jessica eventually stopping flinching when given white flowers.

In the less successful responses, students:

* confused the unconditioned and conditioned stimuli
* responded with “flowers” rather than “white flowers”
* identified extinction as systematic desensitisation.

The more successful responses in 2(b) demonstrated an understanding that:

* preparedness is an innate and adaptive response to enable survival in the face of danger.

When students knew the concept of preparedness, they were able to explain it well. However, many students were not familiar with this term, and frequently left a blank space or reworded the question.

Other less successful responses included:

* acknowledgement that avoidance was more likely with bees than flowers, but did not explain why.

In the more successful responses in 2(c), students noted the ‘state’ aspect of the question and listed responses such as:

* both classical conditioning and operant conditioning are responsive to contingency and contiguity
* stimulus generalisation is common to both
* stimulus discrimination is common to both
* both are susceptible to extinction.

In the less successful responses, students tended to state that:

* both involve stimuli or reinforcement or association
* both processes result in learning (which was given in the stem of the question).

In the more successful responses in 2(d), students:

* demonstrated an understanding that describing a difference between operant conditioning and observational learning required a direct comparison between the two.

Example: “In operant conditioning, learners receive reinforcement or punishment. In observational learning, a model is observed, and it is the model who may be rewarded or punished.”

The less successful responses often included:

* comparisons between observational learning and classical conditioning
* definitions of operant conditioning and observational learning only, with no description of how one differs from the other.

Question 3

The more successful responses in 3(a) indicated that students:

* made full use of the information provided in the scenario, and provided answers specific to that scenario.

Examples:

“Confidentiality of the students’ responses on memory performance was important to protect them from negative judgements if their memory scores had been low.”

“Do No Harm. Due to the experimenters manipulating the food available, they would need to ensure no participants were allergic to the newly supplied food.”

In the less successful responses, students:

* provided generic answers about ethics, with no links to the scenario
* did not realise that students in the control group were not having a lower quality of food than usual
* discussed the harm done to the students from eating food from the canteen
* addressed one only one ethical consideration well.

In 3(b), students providing successful answers suggested hypotheses such as:

* students eating from canteens with healthy food would have higher memory performance scores.

The less successful answers included:

* questions, rather than statements.

Example: “Will healthy food improve memory performance of students?”

* partial hypotheses, in that either the independent or dependent variable was not mentioned.

The more successful explanations for the investigation being experimental included:

* the independent variable was manipulated by having one group of schools with healthier food and the other with unchanged offerings
* there was random allocation of schools to the healthier food or unchanged food offerings groups.

In the less successful responses, students tended to:

* identify the presence of two groups for comparative purposes.

(This is also characteristic of some quantitative observational designs, and therefore it is not a defining characteristic of an experiment.)

The more successful responses in 3(d) included explanations that:

* causation could be inferred: the change in the food options (independent variable) was the reason for the change in memory performance (dependent variable), as extraneous variables are minimised in experimental designs
* experimental designs can be more readily reproduced (maximum control of extraneous variables), and therefore results can be checked for reliability.

In the less successful responses, students

* did not supply enough detail in their responses.

Example: low extraneous variables.

The more successful responses in 3(e) indicated an understanding that:

* a control group was needed to provide baseline data, so that a comparison could be made between the results of the control group and experimental group
* comparative results were needed in order to make conclusions about the effectiveness of healthier foods on memory.

The less successful responses tended to lack detail. Students wrote about:

* comparisons, but did not elucidate further
* the researchers being able to look at the impact of food consumed at the canteen.

The more successful responses in 3(f) demonstrated that students had a clear focus on audience factors; these included:

* age
* cognitive understanding
* high or low self monitoring
* gender
* intelligence.

Example: “Younger students would have fewer life experiences, and fewer strong beliefs, making them easier to persuade.”

In the less successful responses, students tended to:

* discuss source or message factors
* discuss central and peripheral routes of persuasion.

In the more successful responses in 3(g)(i), students:

* paid attention to the lead-in verb “describe”
* gave well-articulated descriptions of rating or Likert scale self-reports.

Example: “The psychologist could have asked participants to rate their emotions or thoughts. This could have been done on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 5 representing strong agreement with the statements given.”

In the less successful responses, students used:

* one or two word responses
* descriptive journal entries
* physiological measurements (e.g. heart rate).

The more successful responses for 3(g)(ii) indicated an understanding that:

* subjective quantitative measures are often the only means by which psychologists can obtain quantitative data about participants’ beliefs, emotions, motivations, etc.
* subjective quantitative measures allow psychologists to access participants’ perceptions, which are often better predictors of behaviour than objective quantitative data.
* subjective quantitative data reflect people’s thoughts and emotions in a numerical way, such that the information can be presented in graphical form.

In the less successful responses, students:

* provided little detail
* indicated that the information from this type of data is deep and insightful, usually features characteristic of qualitative data.

Question 4

Successful responses in 4(a) included explanations of:

* the protective nature of defence mechanisms within the unconscious
* the role of the id in satisfying unconscious needs and desires.

Example: “The unconscious stores the individual’s instinctive behaviours, guilty pleasures and hidden desires. According to Freud’s psychodynamic theory, these hidden desires are represented by the id, and may play the role of contributing to the selfish and greedy nature of an individual’s personality.”

In the less successful responses, students:

* did not address the role of the unconscious or id or defence mechanisms
* tended to confuse the roles of the id, ego and superego
* referred to the ‘iceberg’, without explaining its relevance to the unconscious and its role within personality
* explained that the id, ego and superego all reside in the unconscious.

Most students were able to achieve at least one mark for this question by identifying the id as being in the unconscious.

In 4(b), most students explained personal growth in terms of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and were able to get full marks.

Successful responses included explanations of:

* a holistic striving towards self-actualisation
* the importance of having deficiency and growth needs met.

In the less successful responses, students:

* used incorrect or imprecise terms such as ‘self-acquisition’, ‘stages’ or ‘the triangle’ in their explanations
* identified elements of Maslow’s hierarchy without explaining how personal growth is achieved
* defined rather than explained
* described the components of Rogerian self-concept, rather than personal growth.

Question 5

In addressing the body’s response to stress, students frequently demonstrated their understanding by describing the activation of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), with explanations of the alarm phase of the General Adaptation Syndrome model. They then continued with explanations of the role of the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) in restoring homeostasis after the stressor had been removed.

In the successful responses in 5(a), students:

* explained the physical changes brought about by SNS activation as a means to escape a threat and increase the likelihood of survival
* explained the physical changes brought about by PNS activation as a response to the threat being removed.

In the less successful responses, students:

* confused the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems

(Students are not required to use these terms, but should they choose to do so, the terms need to used correctly.)

* identified the physical changes described in the scenario, with no explanation of why they occurred
* explained the exhaustion phase of the General Adaptation Syndrome.

In the successful responses in 5(b), students:

* emphasised the protective nature of biological coping strategies
* linked the strategies provided in the question to reducing the effects of chronic stress.

In the less successful responses, students tended to:

* repeat the biological strategies mentioned in the scenario, without adding any further information
* misinterpret the question, not relating their answers to the long term effects of chronic stress
* reword the question.

Question 6

The successful responses in 6(a) included descriptions of:

* optimum performance occurring at moderate levels of arousal for most tasks
* underperformance when arousal is too low or too high.

In the less successful responses, students:

* described a linear and positive relationship by stating that “the higher the arousal, the better the performance.”
* referred to task complexity, although no data were provided.

In 6(b), the more successful responses indicated an understanding that:

* practising the test/driving could make the task more familiar. This would allow Casey to optimise her performance in the driving test, given that her arousal level during the test would be high.

Example: “Casey should practice the elements of driving, various routes, learn the rules to familiarise herself with the task. Familiarity with the task would help her cope with the high arousal levels induced by the test.”

In the less successful responses, students:

* used colloquialisms rather than psychological terminology, for example, writing that Casey needed to “chill out” to perform well
* did not use the information in the graph to assist them in answering the question
* explained arousal as the result of performance, rather than performance being affected by arousal.

Question 7

Successful responses to 7(a) included identification of the following:

* exercise in the morning
* a consistent sleep/wake routine
* a wind-down routine before bed
* 9 hours sleep.

These responses demonstrated clear understanding that the lead-in verb, identify, means to recognise and name a feature or object from a set of data, a graph or scenario.

In the less successful responses, students tended to:

* raise points outside of the stimulus material (e.g. use of phone, laptop in bed).

Most students were able to get full marks for 7(b) by explaining either melatonin inhibition by light from the computer or increase in arousal from social media use affecting sleep patterns.

The successful responses in 7(b) included explanations of:

* the role of melatonin in the sleep process
* Juanita’s circadian rhythm being disrupted due to the delayed release of melatonin
* laptop use in bed resulting in new associations being made that are not conducive to sleep.

In the less successful responses, students tended to write the following:

* light from the computer increased melatonin production
* endorphins were involved in Juanita’s sleepiness
* social media was “throwing her brain out of whack”.

The successful responses in 7(c) commonly explained the cognitive, affective or motor consequences of sleep deprivation, linking them to Juanita’s performance at school.

Examples:

“Irritability due to sleep deprivation could affect Juanita’s relationships with teachers and class mates.”

“With lack of sleep, Juanita would not be able to concentrate in class, missing instructions to complete tasks, and making mistakes.”

In the less successful responses, students tended to:

* simply state sleepiness will “reduce performance” with no further explanation
* state, rather than explain, two symptoms of sleep deprivation
* make no links between the symptoms to school performance.

7(d) was answered well, with many students obtaining full marks.

They tended to write:

* sleep gets progressively lighter as the night progresses
* periods of REM sleep increase in duration over time
* there is a decrease in non-REM sleep over time
* some cycles include a period of wakefulness.

In the less successful responses, students:

* confused stages of sleep with sleep cycles
* identified changes in brain waves, which did not address the question
* did not use the graph to answer the question.

Question 8

Many students answered 8(a) well.

In the successful responses, students:

* explained that the variables under study (personality and role) were pre-existing or not manipulated by the researcher

In the less successful responses, students:

* explained data collection, rather than investigation design
* referred to the standardised self-report, which is not a distinguishing feature of observational designs
* reworded the question.

In 8(b), students were advantaged by describing a specific self-report inventory.

In the less successful responses, students:

* described behavioural counts, the Delphi Technique or focus groups
* described the “rich, descriptive responses” obtained.

When addressing 8(c), the successful responses indicated:

* understanding of the process involved in administering and interpreting a standardised self-report inventory

Example: “Professionals will understand the reasons behind standardised administration guidelines and will be motivated to comply.”

* awareness of ethical concerns should people other than trained professionals administer the test.

Example: “There is a possibility of unwelcome self-knowledge gained by doing the test. Trained professionals have skills to support clients.”

In the less successful responses, students:

* identified two reasons, rather than explained one
* claimed that untrained administrators of the test may create invalid questions, which cannot occur in a standardised test.

Successful responses in 8(d) included:

* an understanding that social desirability bias can occur in completing both seen and unseen tests, but that this bias may be more likely if participants have more time to prepare their answers
* an understanding of the terms ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’, linking these terms to the employment scenario (e.g. “Sharing questions with peers before doing the test may invalidate the test; other people doing the test previously would not have been exposed to the test”).

In the less successful responses, students tended to:

* use the term ‘bias’ without explanation
* focus on participants’ behaviour, rather than participants’ responses.

In 8(e)(i), there were many varied, correct answers, including “I” statements, rehearsing and broken record methods. Most students were able to achieve 2 marks out of the 4, but lacked detail on the second point or repeated the first idea.

Students who provided these less successful responses:

* discussed goals and behaviour without linking these to a specific intervention
* restated the stimulus information.

In the successful responses in 8(e)(ii), students:

* addressed the benefits of the training to aggressive individuals specifically, describing the positive impact on emotion regulation or improved health outcomes due to reduction in fight-or-flight response activation.
* related their description to the employment scenario and the impact of their behaviour on their work relationships.

In the less successful responses, students:

* stated that assertiveness reduces aggression, with no further elaboration
* described the benefits within the context of a passive individual.

Extended response answers tended to be wordier than in previous years. Students are advised that lengthy answers do not necessarily gain additional marks. It was possible to earn high marks with word counts of about approximately 500. Students should use the word count that is available to them on their screens as a guide.

Question 9

For protective factors at the person level of explanation affecting an individual at the sociocultural level, students tended to:

* focus on high optimism, confidence, and assertiveness in affecting an individual’s ability to socialise with groups of individuals
* identify personality traits (e.g. high openness and low neuroticism) and linked them to benefits at the sociocultural level
* linked person factors such as high self-esteem to navigating social challenges and high intelligence to working out their options for seeking support
* explained why socialising with groups of individuals is important to an individual’s mental wellbeing.

Examples of some successful answers:

“Extraversion could be a protective factor for anxiety. An extraverted person would feel more inclined to socialise and maintain positive relations with family and friends, thereby more readily gaining support for the anxiety.”

“High self-esteem would be a protective factor at the person level. Adolescents with high self-esteem would be more confident in their capabilities. Anxiety would not be aggravated as much in social situations, because these adolescents would feel more secure and confident in handling them.”

In the less successful responses, students:

* discussed risk factors rather than protective factors
* omitted addressing one of the levels (person or sociocultural)
* identified sociocultural protective factors.

Example: “A protective factor at the sociocultural level could include having a supportive family, friends and a positive community. Having a supportive relationship, family or friends could help the person get better.”

In the cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) question, successful answers included:

* explanations of the CBT process in full, addressing both cognitions and behaviours
* examples of problem cognitions (e.g. catastrophising) and behaviours
* explanations of CBT in the context of anxiety, rather than generally
* discussed how CBT is based on the attitude-behaviour link.

In the less successful responses, students tended to:

* address only one of the core tenants of CBT, either cognitions or behaviours, but not both

Example: “Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is designed to challenge maladaptive thoughts and replace them with more realistic thought processes. During CBT, the anxiety-inducing thoughts are challenged, with alternative perspectives offered. With a new way of viewing the world, the feeling of anxiety may be reduced.”

* explain CBT generally rather than in the specific context of anxiety.

Systematic desensitisation was generally known well, and students usually obtained full marks.

In the more successful answers, they:

* detailed the process of counter conditioning
* used classical conditioning terminology.

In the less successful responses, students tended to:

* focus on creating a fear hierarchy only, with no discussion of relaxation

Example: “Systematic desensitisation can be used to overcome a phobia of spiders by slowly introducing a photo of the spider, then having the spider in a clear box across the room, moving the box closer to the client, and then hopefully by the end of the sessions, the client is able to have the spider out of the box, and quite possibly even have the spider on their hand.”

* confuse systematic desensitisation with exposure therapy.

For the psychological intervention question, students tended to do well when they:

* discussed a specific intervention method
* focused on the advantage of developing lifelong skills that are transferable, or the lack of side effects
* focused on the disadvantages of commitment and the fact that a psychological intervention ‘cannot be used to treat anxiety that is caused by a biological factor’.

In the less successful responses, students discussed:

* medication
* how intervention could contribute to increased anxiety
* how intervention could contribute to social stigma.

Question 10

This question gave students greater flexibility in how they could respond, either addressing two aspects of the central route or persuasion well, or elaborating on one aspect only. Both approaches could have earned full marks for students.

However, many students did not discriminate between the how and why aspects in the first two dot points of this question.

In describing how a central route of persuasion may have been used, the more successful answers included:

* specific examples
* identification of the key aspects of the central route (e.g. factual information) linked to aspects of the Yale approach (such as credibility of the source).

In the less successful answers, students tended to blend their answers to the first two dot points, and not discriminate between them.

While answers were still given credit for the points made, students should be aware that this could affect the marks awarded for literacy, because the answers were more difficult to follow.

In explaining why a central route of persuasion may have been more effective, the more successful answers included:

* comparisons and contrasts between the central and peripheral routes
* explanations of the importance of attitude strength, specificity, and accessibility (e.g. better predictors of behaviour)
* explanations of why the central route leads to strong and long-lasting attitudes (e.g. high level of cognitive processing required results in durability)
* identification of the target audience as being older (adults buy the food); their attitudes — formed by direct experience — would be more resistant to change.

In the less successful responses, information provided tended to:

* repeat the points already made for the first dot point
* provide general strengths and weaknesses of the central and peripheral routes of persuasion (i.e. the students recalled information correctly), but they did not address the maintenance of healthy eating habits (i.e. the students omitted to apply the information to the scenario).

In the more successful answers on observational learning, students focused on only two key aspects of the cognitive processes proposed by Bandura (attention, retention, reproduction and motivation). They:

* usually explained how attention and motivation might make healthy eating difficult when exposed to family members who do not eat healthily
* discussed problems with replication (e.g. inability to access or afford healthy foods)
* discussed problems with motivation (e.g. unhealthy food provides immediate reward for the model — social acceptance).

It was clear that many students knew the theory, but some were not able to apply the theory to the difficulty of healthy eating maintenance.

Less successful answers included:

* a list of the cognitive processes
* brief mention of unhealthy food being common, with no further elaboration
* discussions of operant conditioning (e.g. the person needs to be personally reinforced to maintain their healthy eating) rather than an observational learning perspective (e.g. seeing others being reinforced for unhealthy eating)
* discussions of why it might be difficult to develop healthy eating habits via observational learning (i.e. the maintenance perspective was overlooked)
* discussions of food subsidisation.

It was pleasing to see that the majority of students understood operant conditioning, and were able to correctly incorporate psychological terminology in their answers.

In the more successful responses, students:

* explained that punishment was used, and identified the different components and outcomes of punishment.

The less successful responses included:

* incorrect identification of reinforcement.