2021 Psychology Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2021 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 relevant 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: Investigations Folio

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 words proposal) for a 20-credit course, and they 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. Teachers are encouraged to support students research interest when selecting a research focus so long as it is within the bounds of the research program.

The more successful responses commonly:

* had detailed proposals/introductions that were logical and clearly explained the intent of the investigation, including what data would be used and how it would be used to test the hypothesis or address the research question
* appropriately displayed data, including graphing and table conventions, in accordance with the intent described in the proposal/introduction
* included discussion on the effectiveness of the sample and suggested improvements
* discussed a range of strengths and weaknesses including but not limited to; the sample, data type, design type used and extraneous variables
* discussed a range of realistic improvements that were appropriate and provided clear explanations about how each improvement would improve the quality of the findings
* provided evidence to demonstrate initiative in applying constructive and focused approaches
* interpreted results accurately and provided a systematic and in-depth discussion of the evidence leading to the formulation of logical and highly relevant conclusions
* discussed research ethics specific to each investigation
* used psychological terms effectively and communicated ideas concisely and clearly.

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
* copied and pasted paragraphs from one investigation to the other. This shows a general understanding of psychology and does not allow the student to demonstrate a deep and broad understanding
* 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 research program used
* could not clearly differentiate key evaluative terms such as reliability and validity
* included large sections of the report that are not required such as excessive background information or excessive reference to other research conducted.

Assessment Type 2: Skills and Applications Tasks

The number of tasks submitted in this assessment type varied and included a mixture of tests and assignments. Most tasks were completed by the students electronically, including timed tasks such as tests, allowing students to practice for the end of year examination. Providing the minimum number of tasks could allow students to demonstrate high levels of achievement.

The more successful responses commonly:

* included timed tasks that was of a similar style and structure to the end of the year examination
* included application questions allowing the students to demonstrate their knowledge in new and unfamiliar contexts
* provided evidence from a range of assessment design criteria and included a range of different tasks
* demonstrated the varied ways students can show their learning and skills, through both tests and assignments
* provided detailed responses with appropriate use of psychological terminology
* appropriately acknowledged information from a wide range of sources
* used source analyses to explicitly demonstrate how sources of information had been critically and logically selected in assignments.

The less successful responses commonly:

* came from tasks that didn’t align with the knowledge and skills covered in the SACE Stage 2 subject outline
* relied too heavily on previous examination questions, when adapted and diverse questions are preferable
* responded to sets of tasks that were only made up of tests, limiting student choice and reducing the opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of selecting sources
* relied too heavily on research tasks, not allowing the students to demonstrate their knowledge of psychology in new and unfamiliar contexts
* provided very brief responses, especially in tests
* used only few sources of information, or cited unreliable sources of information in research type assignments
* primarily demonstrated evidence of the Knowledge and Understanding criteria with limited evidence of the Analysis, and Evaluation and Application assessment design criteria.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination

Section A

Question 1

(a) (i) The more successful responses for identifying the unconditioned response was:

• vomiting or throwing up.

The less successful responses commonly:

• identified the unconditioned stimulus of the salmon as the unconditioned response

• identified the conditioned response as nauseous, or variations of this such as feeling sick or like they were going to throw up as the unconditioned response.

(ii) The more successful responses in identifying the conditioned stimulus were:

• fish

• the sight of any meal containing fish.

The less successful responses commonly:

• identified the unconditioned stimulus as salmon

• included a behaviour attached to the answer of fish

• identified conditioned response of feeling nauseous

• identified meals with seafood instead of fish.

(iii) The more successful responses when explaining stimulus generalisation were commonly:

• explaining how salmon (unconditioned stimulus) and similar stimuli (fish or meals containing fish) produce the same response (vomiting)

• generalising all types of fish to salmon

• describing that the conditioned response (nausea) now applies to all fish despite the vomiting occurring specifically with salmon.

The less successful responses commonly:

• contained no theory throughout the answer (e.g. salmon are fish, fish have the same smell, so Ava feels sick)

• contained only theory without linking answer back to the scenario (e.g. not including any reference to salmon).

(b) The more successful responses explaining why some associations are easier to learn than others were commonly:

• explaining preparedness and linking it to survival with regard to Ava’s situation

• including explanation about biological readiness to learn certain associations.

The less successful responses commonly:

• described direct experience (e.g. Ava ate the fish, and she was sick, so this is a direct experience and she remembers it)

• explained contingency or contiguity

• discussed survival but no clear link to preparedness or learning

• described the association between eating salmon/fish at the zoo.

(c) The more successful responses to describe the structure of attitude were commonly:

• identifying the ABC model of the structure of an attitude, explaining each part of the model and linking each part of the model back to the scenario.

The less successful responses commonly:

• identified the ABC/tricomponent model but no theory was given

• explained theory of the ABC model but no link to the scenario

• explained the parts of the model incorrectly (e.g. affective component described as thoughts, cognitive component described as feeling)

• identified the A part of the model as attitude instead of affective

• did not provide a description for each part of the ABC model

• incorrectly identified information from the scenario for a part of the ABC model

• explained classical conditioning identifying the UCS, UCR, CS, CR from the scenario.

Question 2

(a) (i) The more successful responses when explaining behaviour modification were commonly:

• explaining the sequence of steps involved in behaviour modification relating to parent screen time

• discussing two aspects of behaviour modification and clearly relating it to the parent’s behaviour.

The less successful responses commonly:

• discussed behaviour modification without reference to scenario (e.g. parents’ screen time)

• stated behaviour modification without explaining how the process of this psychological intervention could reduce behaviour

• applied behaviour modification to reducing screen time in the children

• described shaping

• identified operant conditioning but not the steps of behavioural modification

• identified a reward could be using more phone screen time.

(a) (ii) The more successful responses when describing factors that influence observational learning were commonly:

• describing two of the following factors with links to scenario given; attention, retention, reproduction and motivation

• describing parents as a role model or connectedness/relationship to parent as influencing learning.

The less successful responses commonly:

• described vague answers that were not linked to one of the factors of observational learning

• described the same factor twice.

(b) The more successful responses for two ethical issues were commonly:

• explaining the ethical consideration (most popular answers were focused on informed consent and confidentiality) with clear description of how that may or may not occur in relation to companies targeting advertising to an individual’s personal preferences via social media.

The less successful responses commonly:

• identified the ethical consideration only without linking to social media

• identified one ethical consideration and then described a different ethical consideration, particularly confidentiality, voluntary participation and informed consent.

Question 3

(a) (i) *The more successful responses for limitations of the sample were commonly:*

• describing that the sample lacks diversity as students were from one school only

• describing that the sample of 43 students was small and not representative.

*The less successful responses commonly:*

• described a disadvantage of the design

• described an extraneous variable that affected the collection of data.

(ii) The more successful responses when describing the relationship were commonly:

• describing the relationship as a negative relationship (e.g. as time on device increased academic performance decreased)

• stated that the relationship was negative relationship whilst identifying both the independent and dependent variables.

The less successful responses commonly:

• described a general relationship between the two variables without indicating a direction of relationship

• provided a general answer that did not demonstrate understanding of linking relationship to scenario (e.g. phone use affects academic performance)

• identified a negative relationship with no reference to phone use and academic performance

• identified the relationship as bi-directional between the independent and dependent variable.

(b) The more successful responses for explaining behaviour through operant conditioning were commonly:

• describing any three of the following: negative and positive reinforcement, punishment, contiguity and contingency. These were discussed in relation to the phone being a positive reinforcer hence students didn’t change their behaviour in relation to the research. Or certain things that could have been to change the outcome (e.g. teachers should have punished students with confiscating their phones or giving them a detention).

The less successful responses commonly:

• explained only one point and so not enough points were made about operant conditioning and linking to the scenario for the marks allocated to the question

• described examples of negative/positive reinforcement and punishment without theory or theory only without link to the scenario

• described classical conditioning theory with application to the scenario

• provided a description confusing negative and positive reinforcement.

Question 4

(a) (i) The more successful responses explaining the use of social media using the person level were commonly:

• an explanation of the person level related to a personality theory (e.g. Maslow, Trait theory (extroversion or introversion) and connected to resilience of the individual including their self‑esteem, confidence increasing or their personal interests)

The less successful responses commonly:

• described social cultural factors (e.g. staying updated on news and friends through social media)

• provided no links to person level of explanation

• described social cultural level with application for person level

• identified age and gender for person level but description was sociocultural level.

(ii) The more successful responses explaining the use of social media using the socio-cultural level were commonly:

• describing the social-cultural level correctly with reference to resilience from the social-cultural level (e.g. connectedness, social comparisons, support, and links to friends and family etc.).

*The less successful responses commonly:*

• discussed different socio-cultural ideas but no clear link to social media.

(b) *The more successful responses to explaining how excessive social media use reducing resilience using the biological level of explanation were commonly:*

• providing one reason how excessive social media use can affect one’s biology to demonstrate knowledge of biological level, and proving one reason for explaining how this affects resilience

• some examples include:

* suppressed melatonin, hence affecting circadian rhythm and sleep hygiene
* lack of exercise and hence increased levels of cortisol or lower levels of endorphins and serotonin
* increase in dopamine due to pleasure and hence addiction
* increase in stress in response to social media posts, comments, etc leading to increased and prolonged heart rate, and fight/flight which leads to anxiety.

• some examples affecting resilience:

* increased irritability
* lack of concentration
* fatigue
* not being able to bounce back physically and mentally from situation.

The less successful responses commonly:

• provided a biological factor that could affect someone if they used social media excessively but no reference to resilience

• explained resilience with factors from basic processes, person or socio-cultural levels (e.g. if a person has anxiety/depression symptoms or affecting mindset as people can post deceiving images (editing photos to look better) and giving out false information).

Question 5

(a) The more successful responses included:

• correctly identified characteristics unique to observational designs, and not also a feature of another design type

• detailed responses in the context of the scenario, including effective use of psychological terms.

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

• confused the characteristics of experimental and quantitative observational design

• discussed features which were common to other investigation designs also and not unique to observational alone.

(b) (i) The more successful responses included:

• description of biological measures advantage linking to objectivity and a reduction in bias.

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

• stated an example of a biological measure

• provided a description of a biological measure but did not describe their advantage.

(ii) The more successful responses included:

• description of an advantage of subjective measures including measuring behaviour that is unable to be observed and providing insight into personal thoughts and feelings.

In less successful responses, students commonly:

• incorrectly described surveys producing objective data

• stated a general feature of a survey but did not describe it.

(c) The more successful responses included:

• detailed explanations about the control group providing a baseline for comparison, and specifically linked to the independent variable stated in the question (reminder of the election).

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

• provided a general definition of what a control group is but did not answer the question which required students to explain the importance of using a control group, specific to the investigation mentioned in the scenario.

(d) The more successful responses included:

• descriptions of symptoms that would impact on the individual’s daily functioning/would have to be observed for a prolonged period of time/was a noticeable change from their usual behaviour etc.

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

• stated symptoms of depression rather than providing a description of the symptoms. Or repeated the same symptom twice using slightly different wording (e.g. ‘insomnia’ and ‘trouble sleeping for a period longer than two weeks’)

• described ‘sadness’.

(e) The more successful responses included:

• detailed descriptions of content analysis process, broken down into steps and using specific psychological terminology including coding, common themes, frequency table etc.

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

• described the process of conducting a focus group as a method for collecting data, rather than describing how focus group responses could be analysed.

Question 6

(a)(i)(ii) The more successful responses included:

• in part (a), clear description of both aspects of CBT: cognitive component and behavioural component and linked to the question/the individual bullying Cai

• provided two distinctly different answers for (i) and (ii).

*In the less successful responses, students commonly:*

• repeated similar information for both (i) and (ii)

• related CBT to Cai rather than the bully.

(b) The more successful responses included:

• suggestion of ease of access (e.g. if rural or unwell or during a pandemic lockdown etc), or comfortability of being in a familiar environment for the client.

*In the less successful responses, students commonly:*

• discussed CBT generally rather than specifically online CBT

• did not provide enough detail to justify four marks.

Question 7

(a) (i) The more successful responses included:

• considered the context of the question and used relevant psychological terms.

*In the less successful responses, students commonly:*

• used rote recall of source, message, audience, channel factors without applying to the scenario

• confused central route of persuasion and peripheral route of persuasion features

• quoted large segments of what was said in the video without describing any features of the central or peripheral routes.

(ii) The more successful responses included:

• advantages of using the central route of persuasion were the long lasting effect due to having to pay attention, or the formation of stronger attitudes. Common disadvantages of using the central route of persuasion were that it is only successful for older audiences and may not be effective for younger viewers, or the fact that if people didn’t have time or the want to pay attention the message would not be effective

• an explanation about why a specific feature of the central route is an advantage or disadvantage by linking to its effectiveness, duration, attention and level of processing required and resistance to change.

*In the less successful responses, students commonly:*

• stated features without explaining why they are advantageous or a disadvantage.

(b) (i) The more successful responses included:

• clearly stating that attitude influences behaviour and behaviour influences attitude, and then provided a clear and relevant example of each.

*In the less successful responses, students commonly:*

• did not elaborate on the rote learned definition of ‘bi-directional relationship’

• only explained one direction of the relationship, hence not showing understanding of the term ‘bi’ directional.

(ii) The more successful responses included:

• instrumental/utilitarian/adaptive was the most common answer with description about maximising benefits/rewards and minimising risks/punishments.

*In the less successful responses, students commonly:*

• did not use correct terminology regarding the function of attitude.

(iii) The more successful responses included:

• descriptions of some ways people might think about people who say they are not going to have the vaccine.

*In the less successful responses, students commonly:*

• described impression management techniques such as verbal and non-verbal cues, rather than impression formation

• described impression formation of the vaccine, rather than of the people who say they are not going to have the vaccine.

(c) The more successful responses included:

• descriptions of the credibility of Scott Morrison as Prime Minister seemed to generate the highest quality responses with students then going on explain how credible sources are more influential and therefore would effectively encourage mask wearing.

*In the less successful responses, students commonly:*

• didn’t link the factor discussed to mask wearing.

Section B

General comments on the extended responses

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 500. Students should use the word count that is available to them on their screens as a guide.

Students did not lose marks for lengthy responses, provided that the additional material was relevant, correct, and understandable. However, students did lose marks when they provided additional information that was irrelevant and/or incorrect. Clear and concise answers seemed to receive the highest marks.

Grammar and punctuation mistakes, along with long sentences, reduced marks. Many students did not use capital letters at the beginning of sentences. They used run-on sentences which made the meaning more difficult for markers to decipher. Spelling errors were very prevalent, 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 the subject outline, the expectation that students demonstrate the ability to use appropriate psychological terms in their writing 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, leading to a consequent loss of marks. For full marks, appropriate psychological terms need to be used accurately.

Question 8

When addressing the first dot point in this extended response, the more successful answers included:

* identification of two negative consequences (with two contexts provided: academic responsibilities and part-time job responsibilities) followed by an elaboration on each

Examples include:

* cognitive impairment would result in an inability to plan, organise, concentrate on her assignments or her revision
* Consuela’s increased irritability would result in impatience or rudeness towards others while working, which could affect her job performance.

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

* listed, rather than described, a variety of consequences
* provided very general answers (e.g. cognitive impairment would result in Consuela performing badly)
* discussed causes rather than consequences
* described long-term (e.g. mental health) consequences, rather than short-term consequences.

The second dot point was generally addressed well. Answers seemed to focus on biological explanations for Consuela’s inability to achieve restful sleep, although psychological explanations were also seen.

Most students discussed two of the following effects:

* chemical stimulation
* bright light stimulation
* circadian rhythm disruption
* cognitive stimulation.

In the less successful responses, students commonly:

* did not explain how any two of the factors stated prevented sleep
* proposed solutions to improve sleep quality.

For the third dot point, the more successful responses included descriptions of:

* objective quantitative data obtained via an EEG, EOG or EMG (e.g. the EEG records brain activity (objective data). The brain waves detected indicate the various stages of sleep, from nREM to REM, and the times spent in each stage)

(It is worth noting that some students are still writing about the four stages of nREM sleep, which is no longer being accepted by many psychologists specialising in sleep studies.)

* subjective quantitative data obtained via rating scales or questionnaires with closed questions (e.g. using the Epworth Sleepiness Scale, a psychologist could infer Consuela’s sleep quality from her rating the likelihood of her falling asleep in various situations).

In the less successful responses, students:

* listed two methods without descriptions
* suggested a measure that did not match the description (e.g. an EEG will provide information about sleep quality)
* described sleep hygiene practices
* described possible treatments for sleep problems, rather than methods for assessing sleep patterns.

The last dot point seemed to be well understood, but not well articulated.

In the more successful responses, students:

* stated that a moderate level of arousal was needed for optimum performance on a task
* acknowledged that the arousal level needed for optimal performance would be determined by the complexity of the task
* stated that the examination would most likely be a difficult or unfamiliar task, requiring a low level of arousal
* described some of the effects on performance of too low or too high levels of arousal.

In the less successful responses, students:

* lacked specificity in their answers (e.g. with a high arousal level, Consuela would not do well in the exam)
* misidentified the task complexity and arousal connection (e.g. high levels of arousal are needed for complex tasks)
* discussed Selye’s General Adaptation Syndrome but focussed on the fight-or-flight response, rather than the resistance or exhaustion stages.

Question 9

The first dot point in this question required students to describe one standardised self-report inventory (SSRI).

The more successful responses included:

* identification of one of NEO PI-R, MMPI, MBTI 16PF, EPQ/EPI
* descriptions of what was involved (e.g. Likert scales, forced-choice questions, numbers of questions)
* the type of results that would be obtained on the identified SSRI (e.g. dimensions assessed, percentiles on continua).

In the less successful responses, students:

* described self-reports in general, rather than one specific SSRI
* discussed interviews or questionnaires
* attempted their own self-reports
* described one conception, rather than one SSRI.

The second dot point was not addressed well.

In the more successful responses, students often:

* first demonstrated their understanding of reliability and validity
* connected that understanding to the standardisation process
* used that connection to explain why such a test would be used to assess personality.

They also showed an understanding that:

* in SSRIs, the questions, conditions for administering and conditions for scoring procedures are always the same, increasing the consistency of the testing procedure (reliability)
* SSRIs are not influenced by the examiner’s own beliefs, and are therefore relatively free of rater bias (validity)
* SSRIs usually involve the administration of a bank of questions that are marked and compared against standardised scoring mechanisms (validity)
* because the tests depend on the ability of the respondents to be self-reflective and willing to accurately self-report, some tests (e.g. the MMPI) include validity scales in addition to clinical scales.

In the less successful responses, students:

* defined reliability and validity correctly (which earned them part marks)
* did not show an understanding of standardisation
* challenged the validity and reliability of self-reports, rather than addressed the question — which implied benefits of usage over other data collection methods
* stated that SSRIs were free of bias (SSRIs are researcher bias-free, but not respondent bias-free)
* indicated that SSRIs were valid because the respondents knew themselves, rather than SSRIs are valid because of the steps taken in the conduct of the test
* discussed reliability as being able to trust the respondent’s own judgement of his/her personality.

For the third dot point, students generating the more successful responses:

* focused on two specific traits that linked directly to the work environment (agreeableness and conscientiousness appeared to be the easiest to link back to the workplace)
* provided evidence that each trait discussed was understood and then correctly applied to the new position (e.g. a high score in openness would be useful; Zhang would need to be flexible in his new working environment and cope well with change).

In the less successful responses, students:

* discussed traits in response to overseas relocation rather than a managerial context
* analysed Zhang’s personality when there was no/little evidence to support their statements
* used qualities such as intelligence and friendliness without linking them to a specific trait theory
* used assertiveness as one of the Big 5 traits
* demonstrated misconceptions of some of the traits, particularly when discussing extraversion

Examples include:

* extraversion would be useful as a trait, because extraverts are excellent at public speaking
* extraversion would improve Zhang’s social skills.

When discussing extraversion, the halo effect was very prevalent in many student answers. In addition, there was often a disconnect between the identified trait and the description.

Examples include:

* Zhang has a high score in extraversion because he is willing to go to a new country
* Zhang is an extravert because he is excited about getting his promotion.

For the last dot point, the majority of students tended to describe Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

In the more successful responses, students:

* emphasised how Zhang’s motivations might change as a result of his move or new job venture. These responses did not focus on all levels (if using Maslow) but included a consideration of how Zhang would have been affected at two different levels and what that might have looked like.

Examples:

* Zhang’s relocation to a new country may have activated his love and belonging need. His difficulty in communicating with others because of language barriers and cultural differences could increase his sense of isolation and hinder his efforts to join new community groups
* because of the language barrier and lack of knowledge of the local customs, Zhang may lose confidence in his own abilities; so his self-esteem could be negatively affected.

In the less successful responses, students:

* described Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (which earned them part marks), but did not address how Zhang could have been affected by the changes in his life
* provided suggestions for what Zhang would need to do to self-actualise
* gave common-sense answers (e.g. Zhang’s confidence would be affected/he may feel out of place/he will cope because he is optimistic).