AQA
AS and A-LEVEL
Psychology

New edition

BRILLIANT MODEL ANSWERS

Approaches to Psychology

Fully revised and updated for the 2025 AQA Psychology A-level specification

- ✔ Provides the key knowledge and skillsfor exam success
- ✔ All types of questions covered
- ✔ Grade A/A* model answers
- ✔ Written by examiners

Do brilliantly in your Psychology exam!

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Content for model answers

Please note: this book is not endorsed by or affiliated to the AQA exam board.

Important information

! *Do not skip this page!*

■ **The 'unpredictable' exam is more 'predictable' than you think**

This guide is part of Psychologyzone's Brilliant Model Answers series covering A-level Psychology. Use it alongside the Psychologyzone series Brilliant Exam Notes to get the best out of your learning.

This guide covering the topic of Social Influences provides a full set of exam-style questions and model answers to help you do well in the exam. After all, your psychology exam is based on answering questions – what better than to have a book that already has the answers for you!

The exam board has deliberately developed the A-level Psychology specification so that the questions are to some extent 'unpredictable' in order to discourage students from attempting to rote-learn (memorise answers) using pre-prepared questions. This makes it difficult to predict what's going to be asked.

We have tried to make the unpredictable 'predictable'...

There are over 100 model answers in this book. We have covered most of the different types of question they can ask you for each topic on the specification. You can adapt the model answers provided to most types of questions set in the exam.

■ **Some of your model answers seem very long. Why?**

Some of the answers are much longer responses than you are expected to write in the exam to get top marks. **This is deliberate**. We have written them in this way to enable you to have a better understanding of the theories, concepts, studies and so on. If you do not write as much, don't panic; you don't need all of the content to achieve a good grade.

As you may be using this as a study book, we thought we'd write the model answers in a way that you can also revise from them, so we sometimes expand on explanations or give an example to help you understand a topic better.

Many of the model answers start by repeating the question; in the real exam you do not need to waste time doing this – just get stuck in!

> Remember - in your exam, your answers will be marked according to how well you demonstrate the set assessment objectives (AOs); therefore, we have tried to provide model responses that show you how to demonstrate the required know-how for these AOs. Each example provides you with 'indicative content': in other words, the response gives you an idea of points you could make to achieve maximum marks; it doesn't mean these are points you must make. The purpose of these model answers is to inspire you and demonstrate the standard required to achieve top marks.

Exam skills

■ How will your answer be assessed?

Your teachers will have explained that your answers in the examination will be assessed on what examiners call **assessment objectives (AO).** If you can familiarise yourself with these AO, this will help you write more effective answers and achieve a higher grade in your exam. There are three assessment objectives called **AO1**, **AO2** and **AO3**.

By now, your teachers should have given you a lot of practice exam questions and techniques on how to answer them. The aim of this book is not to teach you these skills, but to show you how this is done – to model the answers for you.

Just to remind you, below are the AQA assessment objectives:

AO1	**Knowledge and understanding**
	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures

What does this mean?
The ability to describe psychological theories, concepts, research studies (e.g. aim, procedures, findings and conclusions) and key terms. The exam questions can cover anything that is named on the specification.

Example

Explain the process of synaptic transmission.   **[5 marks]**

Outline the role of the somatosensory centre in the brain.   **[3 marks]**

AO2	**Application**
	Apply knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures:
	• in a theoretical context
	• in a practical context
	• when handling qualitative data
	• when handling quantitative data.

What does this mean?

Application questions require you to apply what you have learnt about in Psychology (theories, concepts and studies) to a scenario (situation) often referred to as 'stem' material. A scenario will be a text extract or quote given in the question. You are treated as a psychologist and you need to explain what is going on in

the situation from what you have learnt.

Example

Chris suffered a stroke to the left hemisphere of his brain, damaging Broca's area and the motor cortex.

Using your knowledge of the functions of Broca's area and the motor cortex, describe the problems that Chris is likely to experience. **[4 marks]**

AO2	**Evaluation**
	Analyse, interpret and evaluate scientific information, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to:
	• make judgements and reach conclusions
	• develop and refine practical design and procedures.

What does this mean?

Evaluation simply means assessing the 'value' (hence 'evaluation' of a theory or study you have been describing. There are many ways you can evaluate theories or studies. For students, evaluation often takes the form of the strengths and weaknesses of the theory and/or study, but evaluation can also be in a form of 'commentary' (neither strength nor weakness but more in the form of an 'analysis' – which is still an evaluation).

Example

Outline one strength and one limitation of post-mortem examination. **[2 marks + 2 marks]**

◼ The different types of exam questions

We have grouped the exam questions into four different types:

Identification questions	Multiple-choice questions, match key words with a definition, tick boxes or place information in some order or in a box.
Short-response questions	Questions worth up to 6 marks (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 marks). These are often questions asking you to 'outline', 'explain', or 'evaluate' a theory or a study.
Application questions	These require you to apply the psychological knowledge you have learnt (theories, concepts and studies) to a real-life scenario given in the exam question.
Long-response question	These deal with long answers worth over 6 marks (8, 12 or 16 marks). The long-response answers found in this book will be mainly for 16-mark questions.

How the model answers are structured

We have tried to structure your learning by breaking down the model answers into four distinct categories

Key terms, concepts, and **theories** that are named on the AQA specification are covered by the identification and short-response questions (e.g. explain what is meant by the term…).

Research questions asking you to outline a study, describe a theory or give an evaluation are covered by short-response questions (e.g. briefly outline one study that has…).

Application questions require you to apply your knowledge to a made-up scenario (situation) and are covered under application questions.

Essay questions 'Outline and evaluate', or 'Discuss'-type questions are covered under long-response questions. Some long-response questions also require the application of knowledge.

Specification: Approaches

Approaches in Psychology

The basic assumptions of the following approaches:

- Learning approaches: i) the behaviourist approach, including classical conditioning and Pavlov's research, operant conditioning, types of reinforcement and Skinner's research; ii) social learning theory including imitation, identification, vicarious reinforcement, the role of mediational processes and Bandura's research.

- The cognitive approach: the study of internal mental processes, the role of schema, the use of models to explain and make inferences about mental processes.

- The biological approach: the genetic basis of behaviour: genotype, phenotype and evolution. Influence of biological structures and neurochemistry on behaviour. Cognitive neuroscience.

- The psychodynamic approach: the role of the unconscious, the structure of personality, that is Id, Ego and Superego, defence mechanisms including repression, denial and displacement, psychosexual stages.

- Humanistic Psychology: free will, self-actualisation and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, congruence, the role of conditions of worth.

- Comparison of approaches.

Behavioural approach

Identification questions

Q01 Which behavioural psychologist developed operant conditioning theory?

Circle one letter only. **[1 mark]**

- A. Pavlov
- B. Skinner
- C. Watson
- D. Wundt

Q02 Which behavioural psychologist developed classical conditioning theory?

Circle one letter only. **[1 mark]**

- A. Pavlov
- B. Skinner
- C. Watson
- D. Wundt

Q03 According to operant conditioning theory, which of these two concepts strengthens behaviour?

Circle two letters only. **[2 marks]**

- A. Positive reinforcement
- B. Association
- C. Punishment
- D. Negative reinforcement

Q04 In the example of a child who fears doctors, what label would you give to the injection that causes pain, according to the classical conditioning theory?

Circle one letter only. **[1 mark]**

- A. Unconditioned stimulus (UCS)
- B. Unconditioned response (UCR)
- C. Conditioned stimulus (CS)

D. Conditioned response (CR)

Q05 In the example of a child who fears doctors, what label would you give to the presence of the doctor?

Circle one letter only.   **[1 mark]**

A. Unconditioned stimulus (UCS)

B. Unconditioned response (UCR)

C. Conditioned stimulus (CS)

D. Conditioned response (CR)

Q06 According to operant conditioning, which of the following statements is correct? **[1 mark]**

Circle one letter only.

A. Negative reinforcement and punishment increase the likelihood that a behaviour will be repeated.

B. Negative reinforcement and punishment decrease the likelihood that a behaviour will be repeated.

C. Negative reinforcement and positive reinforcement increase the likelihood that a behaviour will be repeated.

D. Negative reinforcement and positive reinforcement decrease the likelihood that a behaviour will be repeated.

Short-response questions

Q07 Explain what is meant by classical conditioning.   **[4 marks]**

Classical conditioning is a form of learning through a process of association. That is, when an 'unconditional stimulus' causes a natural reaction in us (e.g. ''food' leads us to 'salivate') is consistently paired at the same time with a neutral stimulus (does not cause a response, e.g. sound of a bell), then the behavioural response produced by the unconditioned stimulus (salivation) is eventually, over time, transferred to the neutral stimulus. This means the neutral stimulus can produce a conditioned response (in this case, salivation) without the unconditioned stimulus being present (food). This response is known as a conditioned response, and thus a new behaviour has now been learned. This conditioned response is not an ordinarily occurring response to the sound of a bell.

Q08 Explain what is meant by classical conditioning   **[4 marks]**

Operant conditioning is learning through the consequences of our actions. If the outcome of our behaviour has desirable consequences, the behaviour is 'reinforced' (positive reinforcement). This

means we are more likely to repeat that behaviour in the future. Behaviour is also more likely to be repeated if it removes or avoids an unpleasant consequence; this is known as negative reinforcement, e.g. cleaning your bedroom to avoid your mum's shouting – you are more likely to repeat this behaviour.

However, if a behaviour is followed by an undesirable consequence (the behaviour is 'punished'); then this decreases the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated in the future. For example, being told off for talking in a lesson, means that you are less likely to do this again.

Q09 Explain what is meant by positive reinforcement.   **[2 marks]**

Positive reinforcement is when the consequence of behaviour produces a pleasant or satisfying experience. This means such behaviours have been 'reinforced' (strengthened) and we are now more likely to repeat that behaviour in the future. For example, giving positive praise to a child after doing something well is positive reinforcement, as they are more likely to repeat the behaviour.

Q10 Explain what is meant by negative reinforcement   **[2 marks]**

Negative reinforcement removes or avoids unpleasant consequences occurring, which means you are more likely to repeat such behaviour to avoid the unpleasant consequence. For example, cleaning your bedroom to avoid your mum's shouting – you are more likely to repeat this behaviour.

Q11 Outline Skinner's research into reinforcement.   **[4 marks]**

Be careful: 'Research' refers to studies or theory operant conditioning theory, rather than Skinner's box study.

Skinner's operant conditioning suggests that behaviour is learned through the consequences of our actions; if the consequences of the actions are rewarded (positive reinforcement), the action of the behaviour is more likely to be repeated. Behaviour is also more likely to be repeated with negative reinforcement (avoiding an unpleasant situation). For example, if you clean your bedroom to avoid your mum's shouting, then you are more likely to repeat this behaviour.

Punishment (experiencing unpleasant consequences) decreases the likelihood that behaviour will be repeated; for example being told off for taking in the lesson. You are less likely to do this again.

Application questions

Q12 Explain how reinforcement might be used to encourage primary school children to pick up litter in the playground.   **[3 marks]**

The school can use a positive reinforcement strategy, which praises children for picking up litter. For example, the school could start a 'token economy system' to encourage children to pick up

litter. This works by teachers giving out one sticker for a certain amount of litter picked up. When children have collected a number of stickers, they can exchange these for a reward, a privilege that the children value, such as allowing more playtime in a lesson.

Q13 A psychology student made the following observation to his teacher.

'The behaviourist approach has been presented to us as helpful in understanding human behaviour. However, most of the data have been obtained from research using animals.'

Discuss the value of behaviourism in helping us to understand human behaviour.   **[5 marks]**

One valuable contribution the behaviourist approach has made in understanding human behaviour is that behaviour is learnt and shaped through the experiences we have within our environment.

Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning showed us that new behaviour is learnt through association. That is, when an environmental stimulus, which causes a reaction in (e.g. fear), occurs at the same time with another neutral stimulus (does not cause a response), the behavioural response produced by the environmental stimulus is then transferred to the neutral stimulus (NS). Classical conditioning has helped explain psychological disorders, such as how phobias occur through association. For example, a horrible flight experience is then associated with fear, which may explain why people avoid flying. Systematic desensitisation based on the classical conditioning theory has been shown to be an effective therapy for dealing with phobias, demonstrating the valuable contribution of the behavioural approach in understanding human behaviour.

Another valuable contribution the behaviourist approach has made in understanding human behaviour is Skinner's operant conditioning theory. This has enhanced our understanding of behaviour by emphasising the importance of the consequences of our actions; whether the behaviour is rewarded or punished will determine if such behaviour is repeated or not. Some critics argue that the behaviourist approach has provided little value in understanding human behaviour. This is because the evidence has been based on studying animal behaviour in the laboratory and human behaviour is far more complex than that of animals, like rats. The fact that humans have a high level of consciousness, with the ability to be reflective in thought and/or in emotions, affects how humans think and behave.

Q14 A young woman says: "When I was 5 years old, I was at a party and a balloon burst with a loud bang in my face. Even after all these years, I cannot bear to go into a room where there are balloons. They terrify me!"

Use your knowledge of classical conditioning to explain why the young woman is terrified of balloons.   **[3 marks]**

The woman has made an association between the balloon and the horrible loud noise. This is because the loud noise triggered a fear response (unconditioned stimulus or UCS) in the woman in the presence of the balloon, which is a neutral stimulus (NS). The woman will now associate fear with the balloon, so she has now learned a new conditioned response (CR): a balloon alone will now provoke a fear response.