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AQA  
YEAR 2 A-LEVEL  
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**BRILLIANT MODEL  
ANSWERS**

**Issues and debates**

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updated for the 2025  
AQA Psychology  
A-level specification

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- ✔ All types of questions covered
- ✔ Grade A/A\* model answers
- ✔ Written by examiners

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Concise, detailed and  
clearly written model answers

# Brilliant Model Answers

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

# Important information



## ■ Isn't the exam supposed to be unpredictable?

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 to the 'Issues and Debates' topic 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 60 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 would need to write in the exam to get top marks. **This is deliberate.** We have written them 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 as we have, 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 means 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 don't 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). We have tried to provide model responses that show you how to meet 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 my answers 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 AOs, this will help you write more effective answers and achieve a higher grade in your exam. There are three assessment objectives: **AO1**, **AO2** and **AO3**.

By now, your teachers should have given you a lot of practice exam questions and techniques for how to answer them. The aim of this book is not to teach you these skills, but to show you how it's 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]**

## What are the different types of exam questions?

We have grouped the exam questions into four different types:

<b>Identification questions</b>	Multiple-choice questions, match key words with a definition, tick boxes, or place information in some order or in a box.
<b>Short-response questions</b>	Questions worth up to 6 marks (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 marks). These are often questions asking you to 'outline', 'explain', or 'evaluate' a theory or a study.
<b>Application questions</b>	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.
<b>Long-response question</b>	These questions require longer answers and are 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 are the model answers 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: Issues and debates

## Issues and debates

AQA

- Gender and culture in Psychology – universality and bias. Gender bias including androcentrism and alpha and beta bias; cultural bias, including ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.
- Free will and determinism: hard determinism and soft determinism; biological, environmental and psychic determinism. The scientific emphasis on causal explanations.
- The nature-nurture debate: the relative importance of heredity and environment in determining behaviour; the interactionist approach.
- Holism and reductionism: levels of explanation in Psychology. Biological reductionism and environmental (stimulus-response) reductionism.
- Idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation.
- Social sensitivity in psychological research.

# Gender bias in Psychology

## Key terms

**Q1** Explain what is meant by 'universality' in psychological research. **[2 marks]**

Universality refers to the applicability of psychological research. This term considers whether a set of findings can be applied to all humans, regardless of gender, culture, or time.

**Q2** Explain what is meant by 'bias' in relation to gender. **[2 marks]**

Gender bias refers to instances where men and women are treated or represented differently in psychological research, and the views held may not necessarily be true for that gender. There are two forms of gender bias: alpha and beta. This bias can have both scientific consequences, where psychologists may develop inaccurate views of human behaviour, and social consequences, manifesting in the perpetuation of prejudices and discrimination.

**Q3** Explain what is meant by 'androcentrism'. **[3 marks]**

Androcentrism, stemming from the issues of beta bias, is the practice of considering male behaviours as the benchmark. It occurs when female behaviours are compared to an all-male standard. As many female behaviours deviate from established male norms, androcentrism often results in the pathologisation of female behaviour, viewing it as unhealthy or undesirable.

**Q4** Explain how 'androcentrism' has affected psychological research. **[3 marks].**

Androcentrism has significantly influenced psychological research by increasing its social sensitivity. When an androcentric study portrays females as abnormal, it can have broader implications for the female population in society. Furthermore, it tends to perpetuate existing prejudices and socially determined stereotypes within psychological research and the theories derived from it.

**Q5** Outline gender bias in psychology, including reference to androcentrism. **[6 marks]**

Gender bias refers to instances where men and women are treated or represented differently in psychological research, the views held may not necessarily reflect the truth for that gender. There are two forms of gender bias: alpha and beta. This can lead to both scientific consequences, where

psychologists develop inaccurate views of human behaviour, and social consequences manifesting in the perpetuation of prejudices and discrimination.

Alpha bias involves overstating and exaggerating the differences between male and female. In some cases, it may bolster the position of women positively, but in others, it may also diminish their position, leading society to view them more negatively. For instance, Bowlby's Monotropic Theory can be seen as promoting the mother's attachment to an infant, which is desirable in a custodial setting. Still, it may hinder a woman's ability to return to the workplace as they need to stay home and care for the child.

Beta bias refers to undermining the differences between male and female. It results from a lack of female representation in a given research study and a mistaken assumption that the findings from the same study can be applied to both genders, thus undermining any potential differences in behaviour that the study addresses. Androcentrism stems from beta bias, suggesting that male thinking/behaviour is the norm. This can devalue women, as they often exhibit behaviours outside the male standard, making them appear abnormal or undesirable.

**Q6** Explain what is meant by 'alpha bias' and describe one example of psychological research that demonstrates alpha bias. **[4 marks]**

Alpha Bias involves the exaggeration of differences in behaviour between male and female. In some cases, it may enhance the positive perception of women, but in others, it may diminish their position, leading society to view them more negatively. Bowlby's Monotropic Theory demonstrates alpha bias because it overstates the differences in the importance of women as mothers and males as fathers in attachment formation. This study could be seen as improving the position of women in society's eyes, but conversely, it could also be argued to reinforce the prejudice that women must stay at home to care for their children.

**Q7** Explain what is meant by 'beta bias' and describe one example of psychological research that demonstrates beta bias. **[4 marks]**

Beta bias refers to undermining the differences between male and female due to a lack of female representation in a research study and the mistaken assumption that the findings can be applied to both genders. Research into the fight or flight response, often conducted on male animals, demonstrates beta bias. It was assumed that this response would be the same for both sexes. However, Taylor et al. (2000) found that females adopt a 'tend and befriend' approach to ensure the survival of their offspring.

**Q8** In relation to gender bias in psychology, evaluate the role of alpha and beta bias. **[6 marks]**

One strength of alpha bias in psychological research is that it has contributed to the development of feminist psychology. Feminists argue that while real biological differences exist, it is often socially determined stereotypes that play a more significant role in perceived gender differences. For example, Bowlby's Monotropic theory can be supported not only due to the presence of estrogen in women but also because of the social stereotype that expects women to stay home to care for

children while men should work. This is a strength because modern feminist psychologists aim to rectify this exaggerated imbalance in both theories and research by eliminating stereotyping, ultimately reshaping people's perceptions.

A positive consequence of beta bias is that it promotes the view of men and women as equals. This perspective has resulted in equal treatment in legal terms, such as no-fault divorce, parental leave, and equal access to education and employment. However, beta bias can divert attention from power imbalances between genders and the fact that we still live in a male-dominated society. Seemingly neutral actions can inadvertently benefit the dominant group. For example, equal parental leave overlooks the biological demands of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, disadvantaging women. While beta bias can have beneficial consequences, it can also perpetuate the misrepresentation of one gender and sustain prejudices in society.

However, while it can be argued that beta bias has constructive benefits, it can also be criticized for downplaying the fact that there are real physiological and psychological differences between men and women. For example, in Bandura's bobo doll study, a consistent finding was that boys were more aggressive than girls, attributed to higher levels of testosterone in boys compared to girls, which is linked to a higher level of aggression. This suggests that by minimizing the differences in male and female behaviour, we may put our children at a disadvantage as we fail to recognize their distinct characteristics, which could significantly impact child-rearing practices.

## Application question

Q9

"A psychologist asked men aged 25 to 35 years to keep a diary recording how many miles they walked in a week. The psychologist also asked each man to climb a flight of stairs, then recorded each man's heart rate. For each man, the number of miles walked in the week was correlated with their heart rate after climbing the stairs. The findings showed a significant negative correlation. A national newspaper reported the findings under the headline 'Everyone should walk for a healthy heart'."

(a) Explain how the newspaper headline might be an example of beta bias. **[2 marks]**

The newspaper headline states that 'everyone' should walk for a healthy heart, even though the study's findings suggesting this only involved male participants. As it undermines potential differences between males and females on this matter, it can be defined as an example of beta bias.

(b) Briefly suggest one way in which psychologists might address the problem of beta bias in their research. **[1 mark]**

To address or avoid the issue of beta bias in their research, psychologists should include both male and female participants in their studies.