

# Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2019 AP<sup>®</sup> Psychology Free-Response Questions

## Set 2

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

The following comments on the 2019 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> Psychology were written by the Chief Reader, Richard Seefeldt/UW River Falls. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

The responses needed to focus on an experiment investigating the effects of a new drug to treat obsessive-compulsive disorder. Part A required that the responses demonstrate an understanding of a compulsion in the context of the disorder. The responses needed to explain that the performed behavior is repeated and is either in response to an obsession or that the behavior reduces anxiety or distress. In Part B the responses needed to demonstrate an understanding of how using random assignment and a placebo condition allowed the researcher to draw conclusions about cause and effect. The responses had to explain that random assignment minimizes individual differences, or subject variables, between groups. In addition, the responses needed to explain that participants' expectations are controlled when a placebo condition is used in an experiment testing a drug's effectiveness. Part C required that the students explain how groupthink, display rules, belief perseverance, and the cocktail party effect impacted the group discussion held after the researcher's presentation of the results.

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

Student responses should demonstrate an in-depth understanding of specific concepts and the ability to apply them to the scenario presented in the question. Correct responses clearly explained aspects of research design, knowledge of an aspect of abnormal behavior, and how social, cognitive, and perceptual concepts were related to group dynamics. Knowing the definition of the concepts in the question was important, but not sufficient for explaining their relationship to the scenario.

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

Responses that missed points often were vague or did not expand beyond a definition in applying the concepts to the scenario. Responses often discussed compulsion as behaviors, but neglected to explain why these behaviors are performed. Incorrect responses often defined random assignment and/or the use of a placebo condition, but did not explain how these design features allow researchers to determine cause and effect. It was also important that when explaining groupthink, display rules, belief perseverance, and cocktail party effect that responses go beyond simply defining the terms and apply them to how they impact group discussion.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compulsions are any repetitive behaviors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compulsions are repetitive behaviors that reduce anxiety associated with obsessions.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Random assignment reduces bias.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Random assignment minimizes the possibility that individual differences would confound the study.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of placebos is done to reduce biases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placebo conditions are used to control for the impact of participant expectations, to determine the effect of the drug beyond those expectations.</li> </ul>

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

Student responses should provide a clear understanding of the concepts while directly applying them to the scenario. Responses must go beyond parroting the question or defining concepts. Responses must demonstrate an in-depth understanding of concepts, for example, going beyond just knowing what random assignment is, but why it is used in an experiment.

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

- Teachers will find example responses from this particular question on AP Central, along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- FRQ practice questions for teachers to use as formative assessment are now available as part of the collection of new resources for teachers for the 2019 school year. These resources begin with scaffolded questions that represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and present an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course. These resources are available on AP Classroom and include the feature that allows specific question types and topics to be searched to find the new collection of FRQ practice questions and their accompanying scoring guidelines.
- Refer to Units 1 (Scientific Foundations of Psychology), 5 (Cognitive Psychology), 7 (Motivation, Emotion, Personality), and 9 (Social Psychology) Instructional Approaches and Sample Activities in the 2019 AP Psychology Course and Exam Description.

**What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?**

The responses needed to address how a set of psychological concepts could impact Karl as he approaches finals week at college. In Part A the responses needed to clearly demonstrate how state-dependent memory, distributed practice, long-term potentiation, and self-efficacy might help Karl as he prepares for and takes his final exams. In Part B the responses had to clearly demonstrate how convergent thinking, informational social influence, and the defense mechanism of regression might hinder Karl's participation in a group project. All responses had to describe each concept in a way that demonstrates that the student knows what the concept is and can distinguish it from related concepts. Responses also needed to show that the student can apply these concepts in this novel scenario. Responses needed to include some form of outcome for Karl, either helping or hindering, depending on the concept.

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

Although there were many ways to address each point, the common themes of difficulty were misunderstanding or not clearly articulating the nature of the concept, and failing to connect the concept to the potential impact on Karl's experience. Some responses seemed to confuse related concepts, such as state-dependent memory and context-dependent memory, self-efficacy and self-esteem, and informational and normative social influence. Others failed to adequately specify the nature of long-term potentiation and convergent thinking.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl will do better if he studies in the same state he took the exam in. So he should eat the same food and wear the same clothes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl will have a higher exam score if he is in the same mood when he learns the material as when he takes it. If he's happy at both times, he'll do better.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl should distribute his studying across a longer period of time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl will perform better on the exam if he studies the material a little bit each day than if he crams it all in at the last minute.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl encoded information into his long-term memory for later use, and this helped him remember concepts on the exam.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If Karl studies consistently over a long period of time, the neural connections relating to the information he's studying will become stronger, leading to a better grade on the exam.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl's self-efficacy or belief in himself will improve his performance on the exam.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl believes that he is good at taking tests, and this belief leads him to actually get the highest grade in the class.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl's convergent thinking means he is not thinking divergently, so he won't have anything to contribute to the group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If Karl is showing convergent thinking, he will only have one way of approaching the group project, so he won't have as much to contribute as a divergent thinker would.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because Karl just went along with the other group members, who ended up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karl knows that the rest of the group knows more about the project than he does, so he's</li> </ul>

having bad ideas, the group project was a disaster.	afraid to make suggestions and just goes along with their ideas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defense mechanism of regression is when a person goes backwards instead of forwards in a task. So if Karl regresses, he won't move his group forward with his participation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regression is when someone reverts back to an earlier stage of life as a defense. So if Karl throws a tantrum while the group is working, this will hinder his contributions.</li> </ul>

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

Some students spend valuable time writing introductory and concluding sentences, which typically add nothing of value to their response. Students should be as specific and concrete as they can be, so that it's clear they are not confusing the concept at hand with another, similar one. In the case of a free-response question like this one, where the help/hinder mechanism is required, students should explicitly state an outcome, even if they think it is self-evident from the rest of their response. Simply adding language such as, "This means he will remember more material and do better on the exam." can make a big difference.

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

- Teachers will find example responses from this particular question on AP Central, along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- FRQ practice questions for teachers to use as formative assessment are now available as part of the collection of new resources for teachers for the 2019 school year. These resources begin with scaffolded questions that represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and present an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course. These resources are available on AP Classroom and include the feature that allows specific question types and topics to be searched to find the new collection of FRQ practice questions and their accompanying scoring guidelines.
- Refer to Units 2 (Biological Bases for Behavior), 5 (Cognitive Psychology), and 9 (Social Psychology) Instructional Approaches and Sample Activities in the 2019 AP Psychology Course and Exam Description.