2015 is the final year of the BHP315111 syllabus, criteria and exam format. The report for the 2015 examination will therefore provide feedback for candidates about performance on this exam in relation to examiners’ expectations of material covered and criteria addressed. For future candidates it is recommended that this report for external assessment is read in conjunction with previous reports of 2008 – 2014, available on the TASC website.

Written Examination Paper

Candidates are advised to read all previous reports carefully, and to utilise advice and direction given.

Stronger responses demonstrated careful preparation and attention to detail, made effective use of stimulus material, answered the question, and gave balanced attention to each criterion. These responses directly addressed the questions by actively engaging the stimulus materials; using relevant human research as well as classic studies; demonstrating a thorough knowledge of related concepts and everyday examples to explain their understanding and application of the theory.

Weaker responses tended to be shorter in length, thereby compromising adequate attention to the two criteria being addressed through each examination question. Often the question was not fully answered, and the criterion standard was not met effectively.

Some candidates claimed that various examples of research proved …; this type of statement should be avoided or replaced with words such as ‘demonstrate’. Candidates are expected to give definitions of the psychological meanings of concepts rather than definitions from an ordinary dictionary.

Section A – Psychological Processes

Question 1 – Perception
This was a particularly well-written question that gave ample opportunities to demonstrate understanding of the entire perception unit. Candidates found both stimulus items accessible and were able to write about them in detail.

Criterion 3
The majority of responses referred to both stimuli; however there tended to be repetition of the information provided in stimulus material rather than using it as an example to support the argument about perception, in particular perceptual set and including additional evidence. All stimuli linked to the concepts in part (a) but weaker candidates often pointed at the stimulus rather than explaining/applying concepts in any sort of depth. The paragraph in stimulus 1 was often not mentioned by candidates while the illustrative example with this stimuli was.

Most candidates tended to list the elements of perceptual set and could give research evidence relating to perceptual set. Past experience and context were most often discussed. Stronger responses were able to produce a well-constructed argument explaining in detail concepts supported with good empirical evidence that clearly showed solid understanding of perception and referred to the stimuli periodically in assisting their explanations of the various concepts. Real life examples added to the quality of many responses.
Criterion 5

Stronger responses displayed good knowledge and understanding of perception and Gestalt principles, with a pleasing number of cogent and detailed answers relating the Gestalt principles to the stimulus items as well as providing additional evidence. Explanation of figure/ground should include words other than ‘figure’ and ‘ground’. Stronger responses discussed Top Down processing being ‘concept-driven’ and Bottom Up processing being ‘data-driven’.

Weak responses did not show accurate understanding of top-down and bottom-up processing. Some candidates confused ambiguous figures and optical illusions. Most responses were able to explain perceptual set adequately, while stronger responses were able to give detailed and sophisticated explanations with a wide range of illustrative examples. However, some candidates did not attempt part (b) of the question at all, making no reference to perceptual set. This had a negative impact on those candidates’ marks. Differentiating ambiguous figures and illusions proved problematic for some.

Question 2 – Consciousness

Candidates were generally well prepared for this question and displayed an understanding regarding the differences between states of consciousness. Most were able to describe alternative theories of dreaming. Some offered formulaic responses which did not necessarily address the specific question, despite containing evidence and content that was relevant. While preparing concepts, evidence and other information is required for any examination, presenting pre-prepared essays is unlikely to result in the best outcome if the specific question is not ultimately addressed, namely the actual concepts and theories of dreaming that were stipulated.

Criterion 3

Stimulus 1 provided evidence on the continuum of consciousness which could be naturally developed into illustrations of the differences between NWC and ASC. Stronger responses could compare NREM and REM sleep and read the figure accurately, providing some detailed analysis of changes in consciousness as the sleeper moves through the sleep stages. Weaker responses did not interpret this information.

Physiological and psychological evidences that defined variations in states of consciousness and sleep in particular were generally well used by candidates. Strong responses included a range of empirical evidence.

While many students referred to changes in EEG recordings, it was noted that the identification of specific brainwave patterns with stages of sleep was often erroneous. Weaker responses tended to present evidence as a list, rather than explaining the direction of the changes or did not explain what this evidence actually meant. Stronger responses considered evidence to support the presence of different stages of sleep, sleep theories, consciousness characteristics and measurement and build a strong viewpoint to answer the specific question. Candidates who could present evidence and examples that were correct and relevant to their discussion were rewarded.

Attention was strongly supported by evidence and was integrated into the overall viewpoint in the strongest responses.

Criterion 5

Many candidates included sleep theories and attention, but measurement of consciousness, examples of ASCs, characteristics of NWC and ASC were often ignored.

Candidates were better rewarded if they were able to address each of the concepts identified in Part (a) of the question. Stronger responses were able to express the subtlety of the changes that occur on the continuum of consciousness; weaker responses adopted a very ‘black and white’ distinction between ASCs and NWC. Many candidates linked awareness to attention as a way to demonstrate their understanding and while this was a reasonable strategy, many used the ability to focus or divide attention as different states in themselves rather than as indicators of which state of awareness the individual may be experiencing. Better responses acknowledged that awareness levels alter during various stages of sleep.
Dream theories were generally well handled. Sophisticated responses were able to link these to the stimulus and attempted to highlight their relevance. Weaker responses appeared confused by the stimulus which presented the stages of sleep, and were unable to identify REM sleep.

Many answers did not specifically address the difference between internal and external awareness (e.g. selective attention/floodlight). Stronger responses linked this concept to moving up and down the continuum and Coren’s or another researchers’ evidence of different sleep stages. Stronger responses justified how awareness is a central factor differentiating between ASC and NWC.

Stimulus 2 was often referred to, however, stronger responses applied the evidence in the stimulus to dream theories. The strongest responses evaluated how well a theory could explain some or all of the findings within the UTAS study.

Section B – Individual Differences

Question 3 – Gender
Overall there was a good balance between the biological argument and environmental theories. Most candidates answered parts a and b together in an overall answer. For some candidates this meant that gender roles and/or gender identity was not addressed in their answers. A few answers fixated on gender identity and roles and were light on the biological argument and sometimes the balance of the theories suffered.

Criterion 3
Overall candidates were well prepared for this topic and were, in most cases, able to demonstrate their knowledge. Candidates referred to the Stimulus 1 adequately however Stimulus 2 proved a challenge for many; some ignored it altogether while others spent time analysing the data in great detail. Generally most candidates presented a good argument and linked stimulus with empirical evidence which linked with theories. Stronger answers had a logical flow and were concise in showing the relationship between the theories.

Bandura’s Social Learning Theory was cited by candidates, many however went into too much detail for a question that was on Gender rather than Learning. Weaker responses went into too much detail when citing some empirical evidence, retelling some of the empirical evidence such as, David Reimer, Baby X.

Criterion 4
The strength of the responses for this criteria was in analysing the stimulus. Although the information and description of the theories and research provided by most candidates was very good, showing a clear understanding, there was very little evaluation of the theories, for eg. This theory is lacking… Stimulus 1 was often used first in the candidates’ response and most linked this well the information with specific theories; cognitive, social learning, biosocial, evolutionally and even Freud’s Psychoanalytical theory. Stronger responses critically and effectively analysed the stimuli, especially stimulus 1, using a range of related concepts related to Gender as well as assessing the quality and validity of the evidences they discussed.

Many candidates were able to use the information in stimulus 2 to link to the various theories etc., and most respondents came up with various explanations to account for the results displayed in the graph.

Stronger responses linked the stimulus with theories and empirical evidence whereas weaker responses (although only a few) did a retell of the stimulus or graph, but did not link to any theories or key points.

Question 4 – Intelligence
Overall answers were disappointing as students did not address the question directly. There were many short answers where students demonstrated little knowledge of studies to support arguments. Some students demonstrated little knowledge overall to provide them with an adequate background to understand the question. The majority of respondents answered part (a) and part (b) together in a single essay. A considerable number of essays did not entirely address the question; i.e., they appeared to be prepared responses which did accommodate the stimuli (to varying degrees) but did not specifically discuss ‘social influences on the development of intelligence’ (Part (a) of the question). Better responses addressed the questions and provided evidence as well as analysis and evaluation for both sides of the nature/nurture debate.
**Criterion 3**

Not all candidates supplied evidence for both nature and nurture – perhaps because both stimuli related to environmental influences on intelligence there was some tendency to focus only, or more on, environmental influences. (Although part (b) specifically asked for analysis and evaluation of both sides…)

Generally adequate to good evidence was provided with the majority of responses citing at least one and in some cases numerous studies related to influences on intelligence. The stimulus material was generally used well with the stronger responses extending stimulus 1 and providing other evidence that was similar to that of the Bucharest Early Intervention Project. The evidence supplied seemed to be well-understood by candidates (twin studies, adoption studies, environmental studies, etc.)

Although many responses discussed the stimuli, weaker candidates provided a recount of what they were given and few connecting statements were made to answer the question directly. This trend followed as candidates often provided further evidence to address both a and b but did not provide enough analysis or explanation to make essential connections to the question. Most used statistics (correlational data) effectively and accurately when citing twin and adoption studies.

**Criterion 4**

Explanations of both stimuli were in many cases very superficial (not beyond the explanation that was provided in the exam paper; merely reworded). Stimulus 1 tended to be merely quoted, while Stimulus 2 (the Flynn Effect) was underutilized and under-explained.

Although some candidates considered evidence for nature and nurture, many did not discuss the Interaction Theory.

Stronger responses related the stimuli to additional evidence which they then explained; for example, relating Stimulus 1 to other deprivation/enrichment studies; relating Stimulus 2 to cross-racial studies and cultural differences.

Candidates did not discuss the notion of / or apply explanations about intergroup vs intragroup differences to cross-group differences such as cultural /’racial’ differences. Many cited plant studies such as Lewontin’s as an explanation for the interaction of genetic reaction range and environmental facilitativeness; however candidates did not then relate this intergroup and intragroup data to racial/cultural differences.

In addition to analysing the stimuli, stronger responses successfully evaluated evidence for both sides (genetics and heredity) and concluded with support for the interactionist perspective.

**Question 5 – Personality**

Generally the paper was quite well responded to apart from the use of stimulus 2 which was often neglected altogether or used insufficiently given the actual question asked.

**Criterion 3**

Stronger responses included empirical evidence and were able to describe the biological influences on Personality development, thereby accurately addressing the question.

These responses also included reference to both stimuli and were able to adequately refer to the 3 levels of Eysenck’s theory to explain its connection with the biological approach.

Candidates are reminded that it is not sufficient to write a complete essay without reference to the stimulus pieces at hand.

**Criterion 4**

Stronger responses integrated the environmental/hereditary/interactionist perspectives throughout and were able to refer to a range of influences on personality. Such responses also tended to include evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the perspectives and incorporated Mischel’s interactionist perspective to further enhance the argument.
Candidates are reminded that it is imperative that the actual question be answered. There were too many instances of pre-prepared responses that neglected to include the biological influences on personality development.

**Section C – Human Learning**

**Question 6 – Conditioning**

Overall, candidates demonstrated understanding of the main differences between classical and operant conditioning. They used the stimulus pieces quite well to explain the learning processes and supplemented their explanation with human examples.

Stronger responses briefly explained the animal studies (Pavlov, Skinner) and then used human examples (empirical, stimulus and every day) to explain the processes and concepts asked for in the question. Weaker responses relied on animal examples and/or stimulus examples only.

**Criterion 4**

Many candidates went through what appeared to be pre-learnt examples instead of basing their analysis on the stimuli and then used Carla was an example of classical conditioning and the 9 year old boy as an examples of operant conditioning.

Stronger responses examined the learning that is best explained through conditioning theories. They discussed the passive role of the learner in CC and the more active role in OC. These responses showed that some of the processes are similar in both theories (eg. Extinction, stimulus generalization and discrimination) but were aware of the distinct differences in the type of learning best explained by each approach.

Stronger responses described shaping, the importance of the order of presentation in classical conditioning, the advantages and disadvantages of each type of conditioning, the schedules of reinforcement and their effects upon the rate of learning and extinction and compared classical to operant conditioning (and observational and cognitive learning).

Weaker responses tended to retell the stimulus (as well as Little Albert and Pavlov) with little or no analysis.

**Criterion 5**

Many responses based their answers around the stimuli and used the stimuli to illustrate the various components of classical and operant conditioning.

Stronger responses fully explained and discussed the terms required by the question, giving more than just a one line response. Examples (stimulus, empirical or everyday) were used to explain the key processes involved in the terms. Stronger responses defined stimulus discrimination and explained this term using the stimulus and empirical examples. Weaker responses focused on stimulus generalization only (eg. Little Albert generalizing to fear other white objects) without fully explaining discrimination.

Reinforcement is a consequence that increases the likelihood of a response reoccurring and is not necessarily a desirable response or good. Gambling, drug addiction, over-eating, anti-social behaviour and many other undesirable behaviours occur through positive reinforcement. Stronger responses clearly explained the difference between positive and negative reinforcement.

Weaker responses tended to detail the process of acquisition for Pavlov, then detail the process for Little Albert and then detail the process for Carla, rather than going into details about the different aspects of classical conditioning.

Stronger responses discussed second order conditioning, with the initial phobia of the dentist being then transferred to the cologne.
Question 7 – Observational and Social Cognitive Learning

There were some very good responses which demonstrated that candidates had prepared very carefully for this question. Good range of evidence was provided by most candidates. There was a tendency, however, to provide too much detail relating to Bandura’s experiment without an explanation of the processes involved with social learning. Stronger responses discussed human examples of social cognitive learning, going beyond a description of animal research alone.

Criterion 4

Most candidates described a range of social cognitive learning including latent, insight learning and cognitive maps. Some strong responses compared behaviourist and cognitive theories and tried to include criticism of social cognitive learning.

It is important for candidates to examine the data given, rather than providing a general discussion of an experiment. This lead weaker candidates to assume the Bo-Bo doll study was the basis of the graph in Stimulus 2. Candidates need to use data labels to help their analysis of the data. The numbers in Stimulus 2 related to the ‘mean number of aggressive responses’ but many candidates referred to this as a ‘percentage’ or ‘the number of subjects’.

Candidates often talked about vicarious conditioning without showing understanding that there was no vicarious conditioning in the data presented in Stimulus 2.

Stronger responses provided a definition of cognitive learning, attempted to evaluate the theories and processes, and provided animal and human studies. Reference to both stimuli provided a good start point for stronger responses.

Important role of models was well understood but often not followed up with any evaluation.

Weaker responses provided a description of each learning type with limited analysis and no evaluation of human evidence.

Criterion 5

Stronger candidates used definitions of concepts and ideas presented in part (a) in a sequential way to begin the discussion of social cognitive learning. Generally candidates answered part (b) well.

Stronger responses discussed characteristics of models and types of models, vicarious reinforcement and punishment and learning to learn/transfer of learning/learning set. Some candidates showed they were not clear on the difference between negative reinforcement and punishment when discussing vicarious conditioning.

Learning set was the concept most frequently omitted in weaker responses.

Stronger responses provided a comprehensive explanation of how humans learn through the processes of observational and social cognitive learning, discussing Bandura’s research relating to aggression and linking this to role models and the data provided in Stimulus 2. Weaker responses ignored Stimulus 1 or quoted researchers names with limited or no explanation of the relevance of the research beyond mentioning children watching cartoons.

Investigation Project

Candidates and teachers are referred to previous Examiners’ reports as comments were again very similar to past findings. Generally candidates and teachers are asked to please follow guidelines in the information on the folio IP.

Overall the Investigation Projects were quite pleasing, covering a broad range of topics, from both areas of Memory and Forgetting. Most were of a reasonable quality, following the suggested format and falling within the word count limit.

Whilst the guidelines are lengthy, they do provide extensive detail about what is required to achieve good quality reports. Candidates and teachers need to be familiar with and adhere to the guidelines for the Independent
Project folio. Many did not follow the directions given. ‘A’ standard projects were well researched and presented and candidates had clearly read and followed the guidelines.

As stated in the 2014 report the following comments apply
- Most candidates mentioned ethical considerations.
- A variety of methodologies were used, the most popular being experiment
- An experiment must clearly identify the DV and IV
- Quantitative data was predominately collected.
- Analysis requires some statistical interpretation of data; it is not appropriate to graph raw data or refer to, for example, 3 of 7 participants.
- Proofread the report and make corrections before it is submitted.

**Criterion 1**
In general project topics were reasonably diverse. Better projects showed a high level of sophistication in the presentation of the report, including reference to a breadth of relevant secondary source material, detailed analysis of the collected data and use of appropriate psychological concepts and theoretical perspectives to explain findings.
- There were quite a few introductions that just consisted of lists of definitions.
- There was very little discussion of previous related research.
- Not all candidates used terms accurately.
- Candidates need to be encouraged to get their definitions from Psychological sources. Alleydog, Wikipedia and online dictionaries are not credible psychological sources.
- There was a misunderstanding of ‘debrief’ – it is not something which is explained to subjects at the start of the research process.
- A hypothesis is not proved.
- Some candidates reported the ‘mean average’ but only need one of these terms since they mean the same thing.
- Many projects started into the chosen topic with little reference to key concepts and their relevance.
- Some introductions with 400 words meant candidates repeated quotes and information in the discussion rather than building on their Literature review.
- Direct quotations need to have the page number, especially when it is obvious that it has been taken from a book, for example, Grivas.
- The Experimental task should be presented in the Appendix, not just referred to in the Method. Power points can be included via screen shots.
- Data needs to be presented carefully. Axis on graphs should be labelled. Statement of results should match the graph. Raw data should not be used in graphs.
- Extra graphs presented in the appendix should be referred to.
- Lack of or poor proofreading made interpreting results quite difficult in some cases as some elements of graphs were mislabelled – ie males and males instead of males and females
- Student names and school names still sometimes appear on sample forms in appendices so it is very important to check.
- Many candidates did not take advantage of their full word allocation, only writing between 800 and 900 words.
- Hypotheses were not well written on the whole. There were many long, clumsy, repetitive hypotheses which would be difficult to test because they were too general.

**Criterion 7**
Generally, candidates used an appropriate method; however, there were cases in which candidates clearly misunderstood the terms they were dealing with and hence could did not test what they said they were testing. In some cases candidates had a slightly different hypothesis each time it was mentioned, which resulted in an unfocussed, baffling report.
- A method that will simply answer a research question operates effectively… no need to make it far more complex than required.
- Generally, candidates explained their method clearly. While the IV and DV were correctly identified in most cases, some candidates did not understand these concepts.
• The ethical guidelines were very well understood and rigidly followed.
• In the strongest IPs there was a clear and evident connection between the primary and secondary sources and three different types of sources were used. Occasionally, a report was all internet sources.
• A few reports did not categorise the types of sources they used as was requested in the Guidelines. Referencing of sources was generally well-handled and observed the formatting requested in the Guidelines; however, many candidates forgot to reference their own personal investigation.
• There was poor in-text referencing of websites which often included far too much unwieldy information.
• Weaker candidates did not come back to their secondary sources in the Discussion section but after analysing their results went straight into the limitations of their own research design.
• It is positive to see candidates are aware of the limitations of their chosen research method, however candidates need to be careful that they do not ‘pad out’ their discussion by focussing heavily on this to the detriment of discussing their own research and its implications.
• There was some misinterpretation of the primary data. Many candidates exaggerated small differences between groups or said that their hypothesis had been supported when it clearly had not.
• The method needs to be clearly stated.
• The number of participants needs to be clearly stated. There were some projects with straightforward topics with 4 participants, this is not enough. ‘There were roughly 3-4 students in each control and experimental group’, is not a precise description of participants.
• Small sample size limits the validity of conclusions which could be drawn.
• Online References need to be creditable.
• Ethics need to be referred to in the Method. The marker should not have to search for the reference to ethics in the disclaimer.
• Word count should be accurate. There were a number of projects where candidates had counted the method and results in the word count. These were quite short projects.