

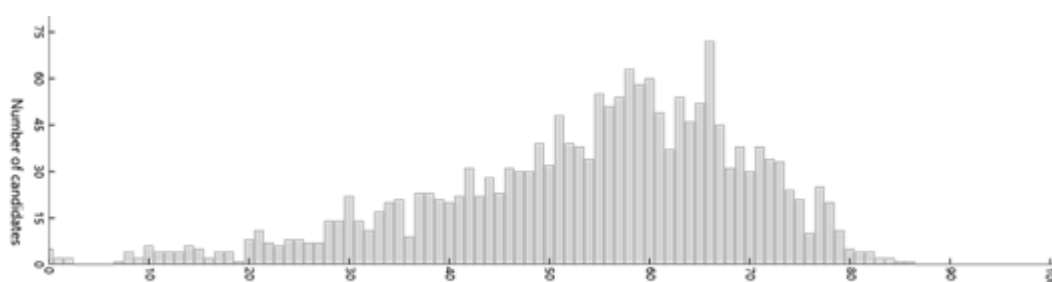


2021 ATAR course examination report: Psychology

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2021	1824	48
2020	1839	49
2019	1950	22
2018	2108	30

The number of candidates sitting and the number attempting each section of the examination can differ as a result of non-attempts across sections of the examination.

Examination score distribution–Written



Summary

The examination followed the design brief, utilising syllabus terminology to formulate the questions. The recent trend to incorporate empirical data as stimuli for questions continued. Research methods were assessed in the extended answer for the first time to remove the erroneous notion that psychological theories and applications exist in isolation from research. The overall mean for the paper increased from 49.16% in 2020 with higher means in Sections One and Two.

Attempted by 1820 candidates	Mean 53.89%	Max 86.18%	Min 0.00%
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Section means were:

Section One: Research methods	Mean 53.73%		
Attempted by 1816 candidates	Mean 10.75(/20)	Max 20.00	Min 0.00
Section Two: Short answer	Mean 56.32%		
Attempted by 1817 candidates	Mean 30.97(/55)	Max 49.83	Min 0.00
Section Three: Extended answer	Mean 48.67%		
Attempted by 1775 candidates	Mean 12.17(/25)	Max 22.69	Min 0.00

General comments

The examination was accessible with the maximum possible mark reached for every question, including all components of the Extended answer questions. The examination allowed for discrimination between the candidates. There was a good balance of questions from across the syllabus, with content being assessed that had not been assessed in the recent papers. The majority of candidates could complete all of the paper in the given time.

Advice for candidates

- Use syllabus content points as the primary reference for any revision.

- Remember that any and all parts of the syllabus are examinable content.
- Know the syllabus theorists related to psychology covered in the course.
- Do not rely on one particular textbook as it may not provide all the information needed to succeed and may not address all syllabus content.
- Use psychological language correctly and often.
- There is an expectation that you can understand, explain, and apply your learning. There is also an expectation that you can recount the simpler understandings.
- Ensure you are answering the question being asked and avoid pre-prepared responses.
- Pay attention to the verb of the question and respond accordingly.
- Attempt all question parts.
- If using diagrams in the extended response section, ensure they are referred to in the body of the text.
- Plan your Extended answer responses to maximise marks.

Advice for teachers

- There are varying levels of questioning in all examinations; emphasise the need for students to recall, explain, and apply elements of the syllabus.
- Ensure the correct theorists are referred to, with attention to dates. For instance, Baddley and Hitch (1974) are specified in the syllabus, which does not reference the episodic buffer which is included in a later revision by Baddley (2000).
- Do not rely solely on one textbook; use various resources and textbooks to cover the syllabus.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Research methods (33 Marks)

Section One consisted of two questions covering syllabus content on planning, conducting, processing, and evaluating psychological research. The average of 53.73% was higher than in 2020 (45.39%). Some candidates demonstrated limited or generic understanding of areas of the syllabus content. Research designs and evaluation (particularly sources of error) were areas of weakness identified in this examination.

Question 1 attempted by 1815 candidates Mean 7.83(/16) Max 16 Min 0
Candidates needed to apply details from any scenario presented to obtain full marks. For instance, in part (c), several responses failed to identify the sample as being from Ari's school, and in part (g)(ii), some responses were not relevant to Ari's experiment. In addition, when asked for benefits and limitations of a cross-sectional design, candidates stated factors such as 'quick' or 'cheap'. These are not necessarily specific to cross-sectional designs, and more detail was required. Candidates failed to provide the details of cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. Experimenter effect appeared to confuse some candidates, with some responses simply re-writing the question.

Question 2 attempted by 1807 candidates Mean 9.90(/17) Max 17 Min 0
This question was answered better than Question 1, suggesting processing of data is a relative strength. Candidates are reminded to read the question carefully. Some still constructed bar graphs despite being asked to construct a line graph. A few candidates did not address the command verb for part (b) and did not respond appropriately. Part (d) was a discriminator, and stronger candidates could differentiate variance as a measure of dispersion against the mean, whereas range considers the entire data set. Reading of normal curves, including applying measures of central tendencies and standard deviation, was poor, suggesting that this is an area for future focus for teachers and students.

Section Two: Short answer (101 Marks)

Section Two's mean improved compared to the 2020 paper. While most candidates did well in lower-order questions requiring recall, etc., they struggled with application style questions. Some theories appeared to be superficially understood, and more depth of knowledge is required to be able to apply the theories and research to unknown scenarios or experimental data. Candidates need to be reminded that they need to follow the syllabus as that is what is assessed. In addition, candidates are encouraged to read the question carefully and concisely to formulate their responses.

Question 3 attempted by 1817 candidates Mean 10.61(/13) Max 13 Min 0

This question was done relatively well. Some candidates did not follow the labelling of the lateral aspect of the brain and named the lobes in a clockwise manner rather than the actual labels. Command verbs for the questions need to be paid attention to, with some candidates identifying a function in part (b) instead of describing. The use of syllabus terminology is imperative to do well in this course as some candidates failed to identify the primary motor cortex and just stated motor cortex. Part (e) was done very well, with most candidates correctly identifying the class of drugs. Unfortunately, some provided examples of drugs, suggesting they did not read the question carefully or relied on Unit 1 knowledge.

Question 4 attempted by 1808 candidates Mean 6.64(/13) Max 13 Min 0

Part (a) required a psychological definition of memory as a process rather than an artefact. For part (b), most were able to identify long-term memory; however, some struggled with identifying the phonological loop. Many candidates referred to the episodic buffer suggesting students are being taught Baddley's (2000) revised model rather than Baddley and Hitch's (1974) model as specified in the syllabus. In part (c), most candidates poorly understood the central executive as an attentional filter and coordinator. However, they had a stronger understanding of the visuospatial sketchpad. Candidates appeared to have a superficial knowledge of interference; many were able to identify interference but could not explain how the new/old information interferes with the encoding/retrieval of information. Some candidates did not correctly identify decay for part (e) and referred to factors such as encoding or retrieval failure.

Question 5 attempted by 1807 candidates Mean 8.94(/17) Max 17 Min 0

Generally, candidates were able to identify the various learning processes and techniques correctly. Still, some hedged their bets in part (a)(ii), referring to positive and negative reinforcement and punishment. Some candidates had a superficial understanding of token economies and could not correctly explain the role of the ticks (primary-reinforcer) and prizes (secondary-reinforcer). Some candidates failed to identify the steps of systematic desensitisation, and they generated a list of graded exposure activities instead. Also, several responses failed to identify the role of teaching relaxation techniques and using these as the client moves through the stages and experiences distress. Part (d) was a good discriminator and challenged candidates to consider similarities and differences between the different behaviour modification techniques.

Question 6 attempted by 1797 candidates Mean 6.18(/12) Max 12 Min 0

Part (a) had a mean of 33.3%, suggesting candidates' understanding of Bowlby's concept of monotropy is poor. Some candidates failed to mention that monotropy is innate or the importance of the monotropic relationship. Some candidates had a poor understanding of affectionless psychopathy and listed characteristics of a child who experienced maternal deprivation. Part (e) proved to be a good discriminator. Many candidates indicated that Aila experienced distress when her mother left, yet this was not mentioned in the question

prompt. This suggests that candidates have either rote learned answers or recalled the details from Ainsworth's original studies.

Question 7 attempted by 1810 candidates Mean 6.22(/12) Max 12 Min 0

Most candidates answered part (a) correctly, which may be due to Bandura's name being mentioned in part (f). While many candidates correctly described the observation and cognitive processes of Social Learning Theory, the weaker candidates restated the question. Vicarious reinforcement was a concept that challenged some candidates. While a number stated Ade observed his aunt praising his uncle, they failed to link that Ade would attempt to replicate the behaviour in response to his uncle receiving praise. Part (e) required candidates to have a sound understanding of Bandura's theory and study where role models that are more similar (i.e., same gender) are more likely to be replicated. Part (f) was a good discriminator, with candidates generally able to give an example and stronger candidates relating it to the processes of attention, retention, motivation, and reproduction.

Question 8 attempted by 1809 candidates Mean 5.91(/13) Max 13 Min 0

While candidates were able to relate trait as a set of characteristic ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling, they failed to mention that it is innate, a critical component of trait theory. An average of 52% for part (b), suggests that candidates have a poor understanding of consistency. While candidates generally understood McCrae and Costa's five-factor model, a number could not identify that each trait is on a continuum of two poles. Part (f) was a good discriminator as it challenged candidates to reflect upon the limitations of trait theory as articulated by humanistic and social-cognitive perspectives. This question required candidates to have a good understanding of all three perspectives of personality theories.

Question 9 attempted by 1813 candidates Mean 6.43(/11) Max 11 Min 0

The response to this question suggested candidates had a good understanding of social influences on behaviour. However, weaker candidates failed to identify that obedience is due to the influence of an authority figure. This followed through to the application question for part (c). A number of candidates appeared to confuse group unanimity with anonymous. Weaker candidates referred to group size suggesting pre-prepared responses. The ability to be concise in answers was an issue for a number of candidates.

Question 10 attempted by 1806 candidates Mean 5.94(/10) Max 10 Min 0

Candidates were able to list the three characteristics that affect stress correctly, however, a number of candidates incorrectly applied predictability and controllability to the scenario with some suggesting that not knowing when the agent would come was an example of controllability instead of predictability. Stronger candidates performed better on part (b), requiring them to understand the statements fully.

Section Three: Extended answer (54 Marks)

The mean for Section Three was lower than the 2020 paper. Candidates who did poorly were not coherent in their responses, and their answers did not flow well. This made it difficult to award marks. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their answers and ensure they answer the questions being asked and not to use rote-learned information without applying it to the question or using pre-prepared responses. Stronger candidates used psychological terminology correctly and regularly.

Question 11 attempted by 1767 candidates Mean 12.15(/27) Max 24.5 Min 0

While candidates were generally able to outline that persuasive communication aims to change another person's thoughts and actions, they failed to indicate it is a form of communication. A significant number of candidates erroneously spent time discussing peripheral and central routes as the two features of persuasive communication instead of 'source of the message', 'nature of the communication' and 'characteristics of the audience'. Clarity of the response prevented a number of candidates from maximising marks as it was difficult for markers to follow explanations. Poor responses incoherently mixed up the application of the factors through their examples. While many candidates were able to identify a form of a subjective quantitative measure correctly, they failed to link to the quantitative nature of the measure (i.e., use of numbers and ability to analyse them statistically) to their response. Validity in qualitative measures is a comparative area of weakness, with a number of candidates not adding extra details. Stronger candidates were able to use psychological language correctly and often.

Question 12 attempted by 1748 candidates Mean 14.13(/27) Max 26 Min 0

The response to this question was completed better than Question 11. A significant number of candidates failed to understand that group polarisation is about the group, not the individual (which is conformity) and did not discuss the polarity increasing as a result of discussion towards the original direction of the mean opinion of the group. The application of group polarisation to the data was done well, with weaker candidates not analysing the 'No Discussion' group. Generally, candidates had a poor understanding of Kohlberg's method of investigation. Many candidates spent time discussing all six stages instead of the three levels. Asking candidates to answer why people at the different levels of moral development would say that Heinz was in the wrong, was a good discriminator, as weaker candidates often stated he was in the right, particularly with the higher levels of moral development. This indicates either pre-prepared answers or a poor understanding of Kohlberg's theory. As per Question 11, stronger candidates produced a more coherent response with regular and correct use of psychological terminology.