Minimise Study Time
Maximise Scores

VCE Exam Advice – Unit 3 & 4 Psychology

What to Expect

The exam will cover both Unit 3 and Unit 4 Content.

Unit 3: How does experience affect behaviour and mental processes?

1. How does the nervous system enable psychological functioning?
2. How do people learn and remember?

Unit 4: How is wellbeing maintained and developed?

1. How do levels of consciousness affect mental processes and behaviour?
2. What influences mental wellbeing?
3. Practical Investigation (Research Methodologies)

Examination Specifications

Overall conditions

- There will be 15 minutes reading time and 2 hours 30 minutes writing time.
- The examination will contribute 60 per cent to the Study Score.

Content

The **VCE Psychology Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only** (Units 3 and 4) is the document for the development of the examination. Take care to note the adjustments to this year's study design, with the removal of some key knowledge dot points and adjustments to assessments.

The key knowledge that underpins the outcomes in Units 3 and 4, and the key science skills found in the section on 'Cross-study specifications' in the adjusted study design (pages 11 and 12), are examinable.

Examination Outline

The examination will assess a representative sample of the key knowledge that underpins the outcomes of each unit.

The assessment of the key skills that underpin all units of the *VCE Psychology Study Design 2020 (Page 13)* will be integrated within questions assessing the key knowledge *(Pages 22-29)*.

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Each outcome will be approximately equally weighted.

Format

The examination will be in the form of a question and answer book.

The examination will consist of two sections.

Section A will consist of 50 multiple-choice questions worth 1 mark each and will be worth a total of 50 marks.

Section B will consist of short-answer and extended-answer questions, including questions with multiple parts. One of the extended-answer questions will be worth 10 marks and will not have multiple parts. The number of questions in Section B may vary from year to year. Section B will be worth a total of 70 marks.

The examination may include questions that refer to visual and/or written material, including scenarios and/or experiments.

All questions will be compulsory. The total marks for the examination will be 120.

Answers to Section A are to be recorded on the answer sheet provided for multiple-choice questions.

Answers to Section B are to be recorded in the spaces provided in the question and answer book.

Criteria

The extended-answer question in Section B that is worth 10 marks and that does not have multiple parts will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Identification and explanation of formal psychological terminology relevant to the question
- Use of appropriate psychology terminology
- Discussion of relevant psychological information, ideas, concepts, theories and/or models and the connections between them
- Analysis and evaluation of data, methods and scientific models
- Drawing of evidence-based conclusions and explanation of limitations of conclusions

Tackling the Exam

The number of marks allocated to each question will indicate the appropriate length of the response. However, if you require more space they may continue their answers in the space provided at the end of the book.

Students will not be expected to calculate any statistics in the examination. Calculators or electronic devices of *any* nature must not be taken into the examination.

Be as familiar as possible with the question format shown on the sample VCAA examination (VCAA Psychology exams specifications and advice).

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Preparation

- Whilst memory is used in any test of ability, **you should not rely on memory alone** to achieve a good score on an exam like this.
- The best preparation for this exam gives you a **true understanding** of *all* the material, rather than a **memory** of *some* of it.
- Developing **understanding** (rather than just **knowledge**) is a 3-stage process. It begins with initial *learning* (being attentive, taking notes, reading), to *consolidation* (review questions in your text, revision lectures/master classes, practice exam questions and applying your learning to personal experience) and finally to *demonstration* (SACs, formal practice exams, teaching others what you've learned and, ultimately the VCAA exam).
- When revising, you should dedicate the most time to the areas that you are least confident with. You can use the 'traffic light' method when going through the key knowledge dot points in order to help you to prioritize areas for revision.
    - Red = "I'm not confident about this topic, I need to spend the most time revising or even re-learning these concepts and doing practice questions related to this topic"
    - Amber/yellow = "I'm feeling ok about this topic, I need to focus my attention on practice questions related to this topic, focussing on tricky areas"
    - Green = "I'm feeling confident about these topics, and don't need to spend as much time revising them"

Examination Skills

- Examination questions may relate to one or more areas of study and may integrate research methodologies and ethical principles. When revising, it is useful to create concept maps to show how different areas of studies are related.
- Utilize context-dependent cues and complete revision questions provided by your teacher and/or your text under timed conditions (one minute per mark as a general rule for short-answer questions), and in a quiet environment, which reflect the conditions of the examination.
- Multiple-choice questions (which require recognition) are, by definition, less challenging than short-answer questions (requiring recall). Although it is important to practice <u>all</u> types of questions, make sure you weight your revision in favour of short-answer. You will learn more in the process!
- You need to have completed as many practice examinations as possible, but study first so they are a fair measure of what you know and understand at this point in time.
- **Complete practice examinations** – don't just do practice questions, do full practice examinations (including reading time). It is one thing to do five short-answer questions in 15 minutes and quite another to complete a full examination in 2.5 hrs.
    - Ask your teachers to give you exams and to mark the short-answer sections for you.
    - Mark the multiple-choice yourself, but make sure you talk to your teacher if you can't see why your choice was wrong.

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- Read the assessment reports from previous exams VERY CAREFULLY. The strategies, suggestions and criticisms itemized there are still relevant even though some of the content has changed.

  www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/exams/examsassessreports.html.

- Try to create your own short-answer questions and comprehensive answers for them – especially for the concepts that you find difficult.

On the Day

1. Make sure you have a good night's sleep the night before.
2. Arrive at your exam venue with time to spare. Being late can make you over-anxious.
3. Be prepared – bring 2 or 3 "HB" or "2B" pencils, an eraser, and a sharpener.
4. Know your VCAA Candidate Number so you can easily find your seat.
5. Use your reading time to advantage and be sure that you understand the printed instructions.

Reading Time Suggestions

Don't worry about pre-reading the multiple-choice questions (unless you have surplus reading time). Look carefully through the short-answer section, paying particular attention to any questions that you think you may find challenging. Pay particular attention to the scenario accompanying the 10 mark question which is likely to be the last question on the exam. If there is time remaining, have a good look at the first few multiple-choice questions so you can answer them quickly (but still methodically) when writing time commences.

All the material in the multiple-choice section will act as cues to help call up the material you have learned.

Multiple Choice Questions

- It sounds obvious, but read each question thoroughly! Even the most capable students make careless mistakes by responding to what they *think* a question is asking, rather than what it is *actually* asking. It is helpful to underline/highlight key words in the question.

- Make sure you answer **every** question (almost 1000 were missed last year!). Even if you have to guess, answer the questions in sequence. There are students each year who forget to leave a "blank" on the answer sheet and the rest of their questions are therefore out of order. You are better to guess, mark the question, and then come back to it if you have time!

- If you are unsure, you can use the process of elimination to cross out answers that are definitely incorrect. This should leave you with 2 or 3 options, of which you should always pick one. You don't use marks for incorrect answers.

- Make sure you read all the alternatives – even if you are sure that alternative "A" is the correct one. Quickly, but methodically, decide whether an answer looks *correct*, *incorrect* or *possibly correct*. (You may want to indicate this with a tick, cross or question mark).

- Don't search for deeper meaning in the question, the examiners are setting the paper to let you show what you know – they are **not** out to set traps for you!

- Do not change an answer unless you are *certain* it's wrong. If you are doubtful about the correct answer, your first response is most often the correct one.

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- With the multiple choice questions, if you're unsure of the correct answer, avoid responses which use words like: **always, never, invariably, etc.** and choose responses with words like: **generally, usually, most often,** etc. Superlatives and absolutes are rarely appropriate ways of describing human behaviour.

Short Answer Questions

- Once again, read each question thoroughly, being attentive to key words/commands (such as "Use an example" or "In this scenario"). It is useful to highlight or underline these command words to ensure you are responding to what the question is asking of you.
- Most short answer questions will contain a scenario. Make sure to read this scenario carefully, highlighting any key psychological concepts. There will often be 'distracter' information in the scenario, which is not relevant for you to answer the question. Make sure you understand what the question is asking you to do in order to not become distracted by this extra information.
- Make sure you answer **every** question – you can't get any marks for a blank space!
- Be attentive to the number of marks awarded. It will indicate how many pieces of information are required, and the amount of time you should spend on the question (one mark per minute).
- Try to contain your response within the number of lines allocated. Being **specific** and **concise** is a valuable skill in Psychology.
- Use the psychological terms you have learned to respond to questions (i.e. *retrieve/recall* rather than *remember*).
- Ensure that you relate your response clearly and specifically to the scenario provided, such as referring to the character's name. Generic responses (no matter how accurate) are usually worth 0 marks if the question prompt requires the answer to relate to a scenario.
- If you come to a question where you know you know the answer but you just can't dig it out of memory right now – *DON'T PANIC!* – the more stressed you get, the *LESS* likely you are to remember – put a big"?" alongside it and carry on with other questions – most likely the answer will come to you as you are thinking about other things.
- Use the IDEA framework to structure your short answer responses:
    - **I**dentify the key psychological terms related to the question
    - **D**efine these key terms
    - **E**xplain these key terms
    - **A**pply them to the question/scenario. Eg. If the question asks you to list two examples

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10 Mark Extended Response Question

Within Section B, you will have at least one question that is worth 10 marks. In past exams, a scenario has been provided and students are asked a series of questions related to the scenario. One of these questions will be worth 10 marks (eg. Part E of a 6 part question).

- Allocate at least 15 and up to 30 minutes for the 10 mark question during your 2.5 hr exam.
- Read the questions before reading the scenario, so you know what key information you are looking for (such as *population, sample, IV, DV* etc)
- When reading the scenario, annotate and highlight any key features. This will save you time when re-reading the whole scenario looking for key information afterwards.
- Read carefully though the instructions for the 10 mark extended response. It is well-worth using a couple of minutes to write a brief plan of the sequence of your response before you start your answer.
- The use of subheadings may be helpful in providing structure to your response.
- Always relate your response back to the specific scenario.
- This section is marked *holistically*. Assessors are looking for **depth** of understanding. Therefore, your responses should deal with the question *why* rather than just *what*.
- Although you can use dot points for parts of the extended response, you should think critically about when and where you use these dot points. It may be better for you to demonstrate your holistic understanding of the concept by using full sentences rather than dot points. However, if you are running out of time, dot points may be appropriate.

Research Methods Skills for Extended Response

- Identify the IV and DV, i.e. to test the effects of sleep deprivation on memory ability.

  IV = sleep deprivation
  DV = cognitive ability

- Operationalise the IV and DV – State both sides of the IV (i.e. whether or not participants were sleep deprived) and exactly how the DV was measured (i.e. cognitive ability as measured on a working memory test).
- Formulate a research hypothesis. A hypothesis should state the population, IV (experimental), Direction, DV and control in that order. The IV and DV do not need to be operationalised in a hypothesis. I.e. University students who are sleep deprived will perform worse on cognitive tasks than those who are not sleep deprived.
- If you are asked for implications of results obtained, use your knowledge of the specific psychological theory and how it relates to the findings of the study. For example, if results were deemed to be statistically significant in an experiment relate it back to your knowledge on the theory. For example, if results between conditions involving the method of recognition produces a statistically greater score on a memory test over the method of free recall, this implies that recognition is a more sensitive measure of retention, which reflects the psychological theory of measures of sensitivity that states that recognition is in fact a better method used compared to recall. You will need to define what is meant by measures of sensitivity and compare the methods of recognition to free recall when implying that recognition is better than free recall. Use what you know theoretically to support or reject findings from the experiment.

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- When asked about limitations – look at how the specific sample used did not represent the population of research interest always look at sampling procedure: was it convenience, random or stratified. Sample size – be specific when discussing how many participants were used and how this did not reflect the population of research interest (be specific and relate to scenario), refer to sample characteristics in terms of age, gender, etc. and how the sample was limited in truly reflecting the population of research interest to the specific research scenario.

- Description of the research scenario used, advantages, disadvantages of it and how another one may be better and describe why.

- When responding to extraneous variables – discuss either participant variables (such as placebo effect or participant differences), experimenter variables (such as the experimenter effect) or situation/context variables (such as non-standardised instructions and procedures) as well as suggested methods to control for any of these variables.

- When asked whether the results can be generalised:

    - **NEVER GENERALISE RESULTS:**

        - If results are not statistically significant

        - If the sample is not representative of the population

        - If there are potential confounding variables that have not been controlled.

Overall Timing of Exam – Suggestions

15 minutes reading (compulsory)

50 minutes for 50 Multiple-Choice questions
60 minutes for 60 marks in the Short-Answer section
25 minutes for 10 mark extended response question in the Short-Answer section
15 minutes for re-reading and checking questions + your answers (leave MCQ unless you missed some)
150 minutes = total writing time

Potential Errors

Research Methods

- Using the sample rather than population when writing a hypothesis.

- Confusing single/double-blind procedures with Research Designs.

- Using words you're defining in the definition (particularly with ethical guidelines such as *informed consent*, *withdrawal rights* and *voluntary participation*).

- Using incorrect terminology such as 'convenient' sampling rather than 'convenience sampling'.

- Confusing validity and reliability

- Incorrectly distinguishing between different experimental research designs (independent groups, matched participants, repeated measures)

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- Simply not understanding Research Methods well enough! This is consistently the most poorly-answered part of the exam. Working hard to master this content and practicing extended responses puts you ahead of the rest of the state. You should also practice Research Methods questions in the context of Unit 3 and 4 content, as questions purely on Research Methods will rarely be asked.

Nervous System and Stress

- Referring to the Autonomic Nervous System as 'automatic'.
- Not clearly describing the integrated roles of the CNS and PNS in responding to stimuli
- Confusing the second level of Primary Appraisal in the Transactional Model (deciding whether a stress is a challenge. Harm/Loss or Threat with Secondary Appraisal.)
- Confusing the concept of Eustress with the 'Challenge' component in the Transactional Model.
- Unclear explanations of the role of dopamine in Parkinson's disease.

Learning and Memory

- Confusing the term 'Long-Term Depression' with clinical depression.
- Not describing Long Term Depression clearly as 'a weakening of connections due to sub-threshold stimulation of neurons'
- Not understanding the fundamental differences between *explicit* and *implicit* memories – especially where they are formed in the cerebral cortex.
- Not being able to describe the functions of the amygdala or hippocampus.
- Not being specific about the distinction between the UCR and the CR (in terms of what stimuli they occur in response to).
- Not being able to specifically describe or apply the 3-phase model of operant conditioning.
- Confusing *negative reinforcement* and *punishment.*
- Not understanding response cost.
- Confusing context and state-dependent cues
- Using words you're defining in the definition (particularly in describing the stages of observational learning).
- Not having a specific enough understanding of how memories are initially constructed and the reconstructed according to Loftus.

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Consciousness and sleep

- Confusing the terms *psychological* and *physiological* (particularly when describing the effects of sleep deprivation).
- Not understanding that devices such as an EEG, EOG and EMG specifically measure *electrical activity*.
- Confusing ultradian and circadian rhythms
- Errors reading sleep hypnograms
- Confusion regarding sleep patterns across the lifespan
- Confusing the restorative and evolutionary theories of sleep

Mental Wellbeing and phobia

- Confusing the concepts of 'mental health' and 'mentally healthy'
- Not understanding clearly enough the biological, psychological and social factors that both influence and alleviate mental health disorders.
- Not correctly distinguishing between anxiety and stress
- Unclear explanations of the role of benzodiazepine agents (GABA agonists) as an intervention for phobia

The most common error is simply not adequately responding to the question! An example from 2014 is Question 6a which briefly described a piece of hypothetical research and then asked "What is one benefit of using a repeated-measures design in this study". Whilst many students were able to accurately describe a benefit of a repeated-measures design, most students completely ignored the words *in this study*. As a result, 84% of the state received a zero for this fairly straightforward question because they didn't refer to the scenario.

More subject specific advice will be issued to students at our "VCE Exam Revision Lectures".

Good luck with your exam preparations!
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Beneficial Resources

http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/studies/psychology/exams.aspx (Previous VCAA exams and Examination reports)

http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/studies/psychology/psychoindex.aspx (VCAA Psychology Study Design)

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain_basics/understanding_sleep.htm

http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/sleep.html

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4FObhU06-U (Sleep lab)

http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/spinal.html

http://www.biologymad.com/nervoussystem/nervoussystemintro.htm#organisation (Nervous system)

http://www.simplypsychology.org/multi-store.html

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0TTQroCjoQ (Anterograde amnesia – H.M.)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sWnkBf5V7s ("The Mystery of Memory" – documentary)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfhIuaD183I&feature=related (False memory and eyewitness testimony)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQr_IJvYzbA (Elizabeth Loftus – "Lost in a Shopping Mall")

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcFRZsD8DLk (Repression/Recovered memories)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hBfnXACsOI (Watson's Little Albert study)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04TDoiqohKQ (Skinner's Behaviourism)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zerCK0lRjp8 (Observational Learning)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEwg8TeipfQ (Synapses and neural pathways in learning)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s93ywqFa6CM (What is stress?)