

Experimental Psychology (M4X00905) – Exam Information (January 2018)

Now that the questions have been released for the Experimental Psychology exam this document provides some guidance for your revision, as well as a brief explanation of what will be required of you in the examination.

In the exam you will get a question paper with these exact questions on them – it is expected that you will have revised specifically to answer two of these questions – there are no tricks, these are the questions as they will be worded in the exam – and so it is expected that you will be able to be fairly precise with your answers (after all, you have had the questions for three weeks leading up to the exam to prepare).

I would suggest revising thoroughly for two of the questions, but also to have a working knowledge of a third question just in case you suffer from a mental block on one of your revised questions in the exam. In fact, I would encourage you to engage with all of the questions briefly at the start of your revision – the question that looks immediately enticing is not always the best question to answer, and by doing a little research into each of them you may find that you can produce a better answer for a question that, at first glance, was not your immediate choice.

Finally, please do not fall into the trap that many students seem to set for themselves year after year – thinking that, because this is a seen exam, that they can skimp on revision and do it last minute – this is the explanation that is given every year by students who are interviewed because they have failed a seen exam. Usually it results in them only answering one question, or just writing half a page, because they simply have not taken the time to learn the material that is required to put together a coherent argument. You need to prepare for this exam as thoroughly as you would for an unseen exam; you need to take in as much knowledge to answer the question as you would for an unseen exam; you need to plan a strategy for what you are going to write as much as you would for an unseen exam.

See below for information on the questions and general exam points →

Questions:

1. What does change blindness tell us about our ability to detect changes in our environment?

You have had a seminar on this very topic, complete with readings about the main studies in this area (the Chase & Simons papers) plus videos on other studies in the area. This is a classic exam question for psychology – define the issue, describe and discuss the studies and their findings, state what this means for our abilities in the real world, come to a conclusion. I would expect to see all of those things in an answer to this question. The level of marks awarded will then come down to how well you can set this out and argue it; whether you can go beyond description and into critical evaluation; and how well you can convince us with your argument.

2. Describe classical and operant conditioning and discuss the similarities and differences between them.

A straightforward question requiring a description of both types of conditioning, with the inclusion of information on the work of key figures in the area (e.g., Watson, Pavlov, Thorndike, & Skinner) and the classic experimental research work conducted. We have had two lectures specifically focusing on the work of the Behaviourists (from which classical and operant condition emerged) and we have had a specific seminar exploring behaviourism where we discussed conditioning (i.e., the Pearce chapter on the intricacies of things like scheduling, extinction and pairing). It is important for this question that you remember to answer the second part of the question – i.e., discuss the similarities and differences between classical and operant conditioning – this is where the higher marks will be awarded.

3. Discuss the similarities and differences of Lakatos and Feyerabend's approaches to the use of scientific methodology in Psychology.

There was a whole section at the start of lecture three that specifically looked at the approaches of Lakatos and Feyerabend and Chapter 3 of the core text is also exclusively focused on discussing their approaches. A description of the two approaches would be necessary in answering this question. However, the question specifically asks for a discussion of the similarities and differences between them. Therefore, just describing them would not be sufficient. The manner in which Popper's falsificationism influenced the two philosophers could be discussed, which would then feed in to the discussion on how their approaches differed.

4. Does cognitive neuroscience produce 'better' evidence than traditional forms of psychological experimentation?

You need to think about this question quite carefully – essentially there two sides to the argument, one suggesting it is better and the other suggesting it is not. It is also not enough to just describe cognitive neuroscience and traditional experimental research, you need to explain how they are different and how this then has an effect on whether one is seen as better than the other. You have had a lecture and set reading on cognitive neuroscience but it's up to you to present a coherent argument in order to answer this question well.

General Exam Points:

- You should write your exam answers in traditional essay format – you need to explain what the issue is, define the main terms, provide description and evidence where appropriate, and come to a clear conclusion based upon what you have covered in the main body of your argument.
- It is a timed essay in an exam format but it should still be a coherent, structured argument clearly written to convey your answer to the reader.
- You should support your work with citations – where you discuss a study or someone's theory you should cite whose work it is – **there is no need for a reference list but citations, especially of the main people in that area, are expected.** Your answers should include multiple citations for the authors of the research studies that you will need to cover in them as evidence.
- You should spend the first few minutes of the exam writing down your essay plan for both of your questions that you are going to answer – believe me, I have seen people completely forget what their second answer was going to be by the time they have written the first answer!
- Each of the two questions is worth 50% of the exam paper total – keep this in mind when writing your answers – spending 1.5 hours on one question and 10 minutes on the second question is not going to lead to a good score overall. You have the opportunity to plan accordingly for a seen exam (that is why we use it in the first year, it is also part of your learning for future years).