



Effective Use of Psychological Terminology in Exams 2

This Factsheet has been written in response to examiner comments about the use of psychological terminology and responses to command terms in exams. You might also find it beneficial to refer to *Psychology Factsheet 200: Effective Use of Psychological Terminology in Exams*. This Factsheet provides guidance on how to use and respond to some specific psychological terms effectively in order to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of psychology and gain upper band marks. Words in bold are explained in the glossary and the worksheet gives you the opportunity to apply what you have learned to exam style questions.

The examiner will expect you to be able to:

- Select psychological terms appropriately
- Use psychological terminology effectively
- Respond to psychological terms in exam questions

Exam Hint: Top band candidates demonstrate an appropriate use of psychological terminology, accurate and detailed knowledge, as well as effective use of specialist terminology.

A. Introduction

In order to achieve higher band marks in psychology exams you need to demonstrate an effective use of psychological terminology. It is not enough to simply regurgitate the knowledge you have learned and retained; you need to be able to apply it effectively to exam questions using the correct psychological terminology.



<https://pixabay.com/en/girl-soccer-happy-kid-ball-23818/>

B. Application

It's not just what you know, but how you use it that counts in exams.

Marks in the higher bands are awarded for *application* of knowledge. Some exam questions will expect you to apply your psychological understanding to a 'stem' which is a scenario set by the examiner, while at other times you will be required to apply your knowledge to everyday life. Here is an example of a stem type question about social learning theory:

Sammy's parents are observing her playing in the garden. Her mother says, 'Look at Sammy kicking that football between two plant pots as if she's trying to score a goal!' 'I know', replies Sammy's father, 'and watch how she does a little celebratory dance when she scores, just like professional footballers in the game we watched together on TV'.

A typical question might ask you to explain Sammy's behaviour in terms of social learning theory OR explain social learning theory with reference to the stem. These questions are asking you to demonstrate the same thing – your knowledge of social learning theory and your ability to apply it to a real-life example. If you do one without the other you are only answering half the question and can only expect to achieve half the marks.

You might also be asked how social learning theory could be applied to a different scenario, for example, how it could be used to encourage students to complete their homework. Again, you are being asked to do two things – demonstrate your knowledge and apply it.

Exam Hint: Candidates that describe the theory without applying it will not be awarded marks above the basic level.

C. Prediction

A prediction is more than a wild guess. It is a forecast about what we think will happen based on the evidence that we have access to. For example, the Met Office is able to forecast what the weather will be like in any one place up to ten days in advance, based on the evidence they have about weather systems. Longer-range forecasts tend to be less accurate because there are so many variables that are difficult to measure. For example, it has been said that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil could cause a tornado in Texas and that there are billions of wing-flapping butterflies all over the world! Psychologists make predictions about what they think will happen in the studies they carry out. They present these predictions as **hypotheses**, which can be one-tailed (**directional**) or two-tailed (**non-directional**). A hypothesis is the researcher's prediction about what they think the results of their study are likely to be. Like weather forecasts, hypotheses are not just wild guesses. They are predictions based on evidence.



For example, if a researcher is interested in the effect of **birth order** on academic success, they might first look for previous research in this area. In doing so, they might come across a number of psychological studies (e.g. Galton, 1874 and Zajonc, 1976, 2001), which have found that first-born children have an academic advantage over second and third born siblings. The psychologist will make a prediction based on the existing evidence that 'First born children are more academically successful than later born siblings'. This is a directional hypothesis because the previous research allows the psychologist to predict the direction of the results.

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The psychologist might then develop an interest in the effects of birth order on other variables, let's say, the likelihood of developing an addiction. They might not be aware of any previous research in this area that would allow them to predict the direction of the results. In this instance, the psychologist would present a non-directional hypothesis such as 'Birth order has an effect on the development of addiction.' A non-directional hypothesis is selected because the psychologist is unable to predict *how* birth order will affect addiction due to the lack of evidence, only that it *will*.

Exam Hint: If you are asked to suggest a suitable hypothesis for a study, you should make a clear prediction about the results that is either directional or non-directional.

D. Interpretation

We make interpretations all the time, which help us make sense of the world around us. An interpretation is a judgment based on our analysis of the evidence. For example, if I notice flashing blue lights and an area of road cordoned off with police tape, I am likely to make an interpretation based on the evidence, that an incident has occurred. I am likely to conclude from this interpretation that I should change my direction of travel in order to avoid the incident and continue on my way. Psychologists make interpretations based on the results they gather from research evidence. They collect raw data from studies and then interpret this data to develop conclusions.



<https://pixabay.com/en/police-crime-scene-blue-light-862341/>

For example, a psychology student is interested in the effects of eating breakfast on the performance of nine-year-olds. They set up a study using a group of volunteers from a local school. Group A agrees to complete a multiplication task after eating breakfast while group B completes the same task after eating no breakfast. The psychology student compares the results to test the hypothesis 'Task performance is effected by eating breakfast'. Note that the hypothesis is non-directional because the psychology student is not aware of any previous research in this area. The student presents their results in a table which shows the length of time it takes the six participants in each condition to complete the multiplication task:

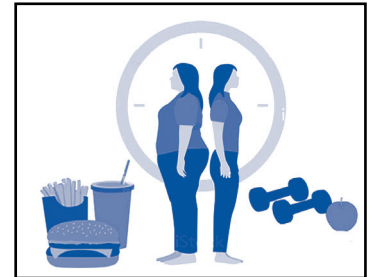
Condition A (breakfast)	Condition B (no breakfast)
67	82
45	71
58	60
43	59
72	77
75	89

The student can interpret the results in order to form a conclusion. Firstly, the data is summarized by calculating the **mean**. The mean for condition A is $(360/6)$ 60 and the mean for condition B is $(438/6)$ 73. The student can now make an interpretation based on the evidence and link this to the original hypothesis. She can conclude that eating breakfast enhances task performance based on the evidence from the study.

Exam Hint: The example table and interpretation demonstrates an understanding of several psychological terms including interpretation, evidence and hypotheses.

E. Inference

An inference is a theory or a supposition or an educated guess about why something might be the way that it is. An example of inference from everyday life might be this: If I notice that my friend Jane has lost weight since the last time I saw her, I might make an inference that she has been exercising and eating more healthily. I cannot know this for sure, but I can infer it from my knowledge of Jane and of the effects of diet and exercise. The reason I cannot know for sure is that I have a lack of evidence; I didn't observe Jane exercising or eating healthily, I simply observed the 'result'. Psychologists are often faced with a similar problem. They are able to observe behaviour but are unable to observe the mental processes that might have resulted in that behaviour such as thought, memory or perception. Psychologists therefore make inferences about the things they cannot see (**cognitions**) based on the things that they can (behaviour).



<http://www.istockphoto.com/gb/vector/fat-and-thin-woman-body-gm497541568-79173515>

Exam Hint: Psychologists can observe brain activity and they can brain processes via scanning techniques but they cannot observe mental or cognitive processes. Don't lose marks by providing answers that lack clarity by using incorrect terminology.

Exam Hint: A small but significant number of candidates misread 'inference' as 'interference', which has a very different meaning!

F. Identification

Identification is a term used in both psychodynamic and behaviourist psychology. It refers to the way we see elements of ourselves reflected in others and/or elements of others reflected in ourselves. According to psychodynamic theory, our first experience of identification is at about the age of five when we identify with our same sex parent. We come to understand that we have characteristics that are similar to them and we have a desire to be (like) them; little girls form an identification with their mother, want to be like their mother and so imitate things that their mother does, while little boys form an identification with their father, want to be like their father and imitate things that their father does. For psychodynamic theorists, the process of identification is largely an unconscious process that forms part of the **Oedipal** stage of development.



<https://pixabay.com/en/identity-self-self-image-801212/>

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Behavioural psychologists, who are interested in observable behaviour, perceive identification as an element of **social learning theory**. This theory states that we learn to behave by observing and imitating role models. These role models might be parents, siblings, peers or celebrities we see in the media. The theory states that we choose role models according to their similarity to us in terms of gender, age, familiarity and also according to their appeal. According to social learning theory it is our identification with role models that results in imitation of behaviour. In other words, we act like the role models we observe because we identify with them. Social learning theory draws on both pure behaviourism, which is learning through experience, as well as cognitive processes. It acknowledges that we select role models based on conscious decisions and mental processes.

Exam Hint: Although both psychodynamic and behaviourist approaches refer to 'identification', the two approaches are very different and should not be confused!

GLOSSARY

Application:	How knowledge is used in order to demonstrate understanding.
Assumption:	Theory or belief.
Birth order:	For example, first-born, second born, and third born siblings.
Cognitions:	Mental processes such as thought, memory, and perception.
Directional:	One-tailed hypothesis.
Estimate:	A rough guess.
Hypotheses:	Prediction about the results of a study.
Inference:	A theory, supposition or educated guess about why something might be the way that it is.
Identification:	Process of identifying with someone we admire and/or want to be like.
Interpretation:	How we make sense of something, e.g., data from research studies.
Mean:	Measure of central tendency.
Non-directional:	Two-tailed hypothesis.
Oedipal:	Stage of development, according to psychodynamic theory, around the age of 5 years when we identify with the same-sex parent.
Prediction:	A forecast about what will happen, e.g. a hypothesis.
Social learning theory:	Explanation of behaviour based on observation, imitation and modelling.

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Worksheet: Psychological Terminology 2

Name: _____

1. How could social learning theory be used to encourage students to complete their homework?

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2. A psychologist decides to test the application of a homework encouragement scheme. Suggest a suitable hypothesis for the study.

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3. The results of a homework encouragement scheme are contained in the table below, which shows the number of completed homework assignments over one week. How can we interpret these results?

Condition A (reward)	Condition B (no reward)
15	9
13	12
14	11
15	7
15	11
14	8

.....

4. What inferences can be made about student’s motivation to complete homework based on these results?

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5. Explain the process of identification from either a psychodynamic or a behaviourist perspective.

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