

## Paper 2 · Section A focus paper · Approaches in Psychology

AS topic mock · 2026 · Maximum mark: 36

This is the AS version of the Approaches mock. It covers the behaviourist approach, social learning theory, the cognitive approach and the biological approach. The A-level version additionally covers the psychodynamic approach, humanistic psychology, and comparison of approaches. Indicative content is not exhaustive; credit any other valid points. Specialist vocabulary follows AQA's 2025 *Subject specific vocabulary*.

### A Approaches in Psychology

**0 1**AO1 · 1 mark multiple choice

Which one of the following best describes classical conditioning?

**Answer: B — Learning by association between a previously neutral stimulus and an unconditioned stimulus.**

A = social learning theory; C = operant conditioning; D = cognitive approach.

**0 2**AO2 · 1 mark multiple choice

Which one of the following is an example of positive reinforcement?

**Answer: C — A dog is given a treat after sitting on command, and so sits on command more often.**

A = positive punishment; B = negative reinforcement; D = negative punishment.

**0 3**AO1 · 1 mark multiple choice

Which one of the following is a mediational process identified by Bandura's social learning theory?

**Answer: C — Attention.**

The four mediational processes are **attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation**. A = behaviourist (classical conditioning); B = behaviourist (operant); D = biological approach.

Outline the role of schema in the cognitive approach. Use an example to support your answer.

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 3 marks**

- **2 marks** for a clear, accurate outline: a **schema** is a mental framework or "package" of beliefs and expectations about a topic, built up through experience. Schemas help us interpret new information quickly but can also produce **biases** when new information is forced to fit an existing framework.
  - **1 mark** for an appropriate example, e.g.:
    - A "restaurant schema" — we know what to expect when we sit down (menu, waiter, order, food, bill).
    - Bartlett's (1932) "War of the Ghosts" — participants distorted an unfamiliar Native American story to fit Western schemas during recall.
    - A child's "dog" schema may initially overgeneralise to include other four-legged animals (cats, sheep).
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Use social learning theory to explain Olivia's behaviour. Refer to vicarious reinforcement and at least one mediational process in your answer.

**Marks for this question: AO2 = 4 marks**

- **4 marks** — Clear, coherent explanation engaging effectively with the stem; uses **vicarious reinforcement** accurately AND at least **one mediational process**; both linked to features of Olivia's case.
- **3 marks** — Clear engagement but lacking detail on one of the two required elements.
- **2 marks** — Accurate use of SLT terminology but limited application.
- **1 mark** — Brief, partial answer.

**Indicative content:**

- **Vicarious reinforcement:** Olivia watches Maya tidy her bedroom AND sees Maya receive rewards (praise, chocolate, extra tablet time). Olivia learns that tidying produces positive consequences — even though Olivia herself was not rewarded.
- **Identification:** Maya is Olivia's older sister — a high-status, similar-age role model with whom Olivia is likely to identify, making imitation more likely.
- **Mediational processes** (credit any one):
  - **Attention** — Olivia notices Maya being praised and rewarded. The salience of the chocolate/tablet rewards captures her attention.
  - **Retention** — Olivia stores a mental representation of the tidying behaviour and the rewards that followed.
  - **Motor reproduction** — Olivia can physically reproduce the tidying behaviour (she has the ability).
  - **Motivation** — Olivia is motivated to copy the behaviour because she has seen it lead to desirable rewards (the augmented motivation from vicarious reinforcement).

*Top-band answers will explicitly use SLT terminology AND link to specific stem features (the rewards Maya received; Olivia "begins tidying her own bedroom without being asked").*

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Use the biological approach to explain what the findings suggest about the genetic basis of intelligence. Refer to genotype and phenotype.

**Marks for this question: AO2 = 4 marks**

- **4 marks** — Clear, coherent explanation engaging effectively with the stem; defines genotype AND phenotype accurately; links them to the twin findings.
- **3 marks** — Clear engagement but lacking detail in one element.
- **2 marks** — Definitions accurate but limited application.
- **1 mark** — Brief, partial answer.

**Indicative content:**

- **Genotype:** the genetic make-up of an individual — the actual genes carried on the chromosomes (fixed at conception). Identical (MZ) twins share 100% of their genotype.
- **Phenotype:** the observable characteristics (in this case IQ scores) that result from the interaction of the genotype with the environment.
- **Application to the findings:** even though the twins were raised in different homes (different environments), their IQ scores remained very similar. Because they share identical genotypes but had different environments, the similarity in their phenotype (IQ) suggests intelligence has a strong genetic component.
- **Qualification:** the similarity isn't 100% — credit candidates who note this, since it shows environment also affects the phenotype (interactionist view).

*Top-band answers will define both terms AND explicitly link the design (separated identical twins) to the inference (genetic contribution to intelligence).*

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0 7

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

Briefly explain the difference between *genotype* and *phenotype*.

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 3 marks**

- **1 mark** for accurate definition of **genotype**: the genetic make-up of an individual — the genes they carry on their chromosomes.
  - **1 mark** for accurate definition of **phenotype**: the observable characteristics that result from the interaction of the genotype with the environment.
  - **1 mark** for a clear example showing the distinction, e.g.:
    - Identical twins share the same *genotype* but can have different *phenotypes* (e.g. one becomes overweight, the other does not — due to environmental differences).
    - A child may have a genotype for tall stature, but if undernourished may have a shorter phenotype.
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0 8

AO1 · 3 marks short answer

Briefly outline the difference between *classical conditioning* and *operant conditioning*.

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 3 marks**

- **1 mark** for accurate description of **classical conditioning**: learning by *association* — a previously neutral stimulus (NS) is repeatedly paired with an unconditioned stimulus (UCS) until the NS alone produces the response (Pavlov's dogs — bell + food → salivation).
  - **1 mark** for accurate description of **operant conditioning**: learning through *consequences* — behaviour followed by pleasant consequences is more likely to be repeated (Skinner's rats — lever press → food → more lever presses).
  - **1 mark** for an example of each:
    - Classical: a dog learns to salivate at the sound of a bell.
    - Operant: a child receives praise for tidying up and tidies up more often (positive reinforcement).
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*Outline what is meant by cognitive neuroscience. Refer to one example of research that uses cognitive neuroscience in your answer.*

**Marks for this question: AO1 = 4 marks**

- **2 marks** for an accurate outline: cognitive neuroscience is the scientific study of how **cognitive functions emerge from the physical and chemical activity of neurons and brain structures**. It uses brain-imaging techniques (fMRI, PET, EEG, ERPs) to map specific mental processes onto specific brain regions. In the 2025 spec, cognitive neuroscience is taught inside the biological approach.
- **2 marks** for one example of cognitive-neuroscience research:
  - **Maguire et al. (2000)** — London taxi drivers had significantly larger posterior hippocampi (associated with spatial navigation) than controls; size correlated with years of experience.
  - **Tulving et al. (1994)** — PET scans showed semantic memories activated the left prefrontal cortex while episodic memories activated the right prefrontal cortex.
  - **Broca's area** (left frontal lobe) — language production; identified through post-mortem and confirmed by modern brain imaging.

*1 mark only for an example without a clear outline of cognitive neuroscience.*

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Discuss the behaviourist approach. Refer to the case of Ahmed as part of your discussion.

Marks for this question: AO1 = 4 marks, AO2 = 4 marks, AO3 = 4 marks

Level	Marks	Descriptor
4	10–12	Knowledge of the behaviourist approach is accurate and generally well detailed. Application to Ahmed is effective and integrated. Discussion is effective with appropriate evaluation. Clear, coherent and focused. Specialist terminology used effectively.
3	7–9	Knowledge evident with some accuracy. Application mostly effective. Discussion mostly effective but limited in places.
2	4–6	Some accurate knowledge. Application limited or partial. Discussion superficial or mainly descriptive.
1	1–3	Knowledge limited; little or no application or discussion.
0	0	No relevant content.

#### Indicative AO1 content:

- **Core assumptions:** all behaviour is learned through experience; we are born as a "blank slate"; only observable behaviour is the proper subject of psychology; the same laws of learning apply to humans and other animals.
- **Classical conditioning (Pavlov):** learning by association — NS + UCS → CR (Pavlov's dogs salivating to a bell paired with food). Includes extinction, spontaneous recovery, stimulus generalisation.
- **Operant conditioning (Skinner):** learning by consequences — positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, negative punishment. Skinner's box. Variable-ratio schedules produce the most persistent behaviour.

#### Indicative AO2 content — engagement with Ahmed:

- **Acquisition by classical conditioning:** as a child, Ahmed experienced fear (UCR) during turbulence (UCS). The plane (NS) became paired with fear, becoming a CS that triggers fear (CR) on its own.
- **Maintenance by operant conditioning:** Ahmed's avoidance behaviour (booking trains instead) removes the anxiety-provoking stimulus. The "strong sense of relief" is negative reinforcement — anxiety reduction rewards the avoidance, making it more likely to repeat.
- **Treatment implication:** behaviourist principles directly underpin treatments like systematic desensitisation (counter-conditioning) and flooding (extinction by preventing avoidance) — both could be used to treat Ahmed's fear.

#### Indicative AO3 content (any combination):

- **Strength — scientific credibility:** behaviourism's commitment to objective, controlled lab experiments (Skinner's box, Pavlov's apparatus) gave psychology genuine scientific status.

- **Strength — real-world applications:** applied success in token economies (psychiatric hospitals, schools), systematic desensitisation for phobias, classroom management. Strong economic case for behaviour modification techniques.
- **Limitation — environmental reductionism:** reduces complex human behaviour to stimulus–response associations, ignoring cognition, emotion and biology.
- **Limitation — over-reliance on animal research:** Pavlov's dogs, Skinner's rats and pigeons — generalisability to humans is questionable because humans have language and complex cognition.
- **Limitation — environmental determinism:** Skinner explicitly denied free will; conflicts with everyday experience of choice and with the legal system's assumption of moral responsibility.
- **Limitation — ethical issues** with animal research (Skinner starved rats to 80% body weight; Watson and Rayner's Little Albert study would be unethical today).

*Top-band AS answers will (1) describe both classical and operant conditioning, (2) explicitly map Ahmed's turbulence to UCS/CR and his avoidance to negative reinforcement, and (3) include at least two evaluation points.*

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END OF MARK SCHEME · Maximum mark: 36