

A LEVEL
Candidate Style Answers

PSYCHOLOGY

H567
For first teaching in 2015

Component 3 – Sports and exercise psychology

Version 1



Contents

Introduction		3		
Question 9a - Level 4			Question 9c - Level 4	
Sample answer	4		Sample answer	8
Commentary	4		Commentary	8
Question 9a - Level 2			Question 9c - Level 2	
Sample answer	5		Sample answer	9
Commentary	5		Commentary	9
Question 9a - Level 1			Question 9c - Level 1	
Sample answer	6		Sample answer	10
Commentary	6		Commentary	10
Question 9b - Level 4				
Sample answer	6			
Commentary	6			
Question 9b - Level 2				
Sample answer	7			
Commentary	7			
Question 9b - Level 1				
Sample answer	8			
Commentary	8			

Introduction

This resource has been produced by a senior member of the A Level Psychology examining team to offer teachers an insight into how the assessment objectives are applied.

As these responses have not been through full moderation, they are banded to give an indication of the level of each response.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

The sample assessment material for these answers and commentary can be found on the A Level Psychology web page and accessed via the following link: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/171772-unit-h567-03-applied-psychology-sample-assessment-materials.pdf>



Component 3 – Sports and exercise psychology

Section A: Answer all the questions in Section A

Question 9a

Explain how research by Smith et al (1979) could be used to improve the relationship skills of youth sports coaches.

[10]

Sample answer – Level 4

The quality of a child's experience in a sports program largely depends on the environment created by the coach. Sports Psychologists Ronald Smith and Frank Smoll designed the Coach Effectiveness Training (CET) program to instruct youth sports coaches on the finer points of team-building, esteem-nurturing, and example-setting. Based on cognitive-behavioural therapy techniques, CET teaches coaches to be aware of their behaviours, to understand how their behaviours are perceived by their young athletes, and to foresee the impacts of their behaviours. CET also instils in coaches a commitment to improving children's skills and rewarding their efforts, replacing the "winning is everything" philosophy, which is all too common in youth sport.

According to Smith et al, the goals of coaching are reinforcement, encouragement and technical instruction; to increase positive interactions between coach and players as well as between teammates and to reduce fear of failure among players. The coaches were encouraged to show self-awareness. More specifically, Smith et al identify precisely how coach-player relationships in youth training can be improved, as follows:

Reactions to players' behaviours in various scenarios. In good plays, REWARD immediately, especially effort for screw-ups and boneheaded plays immediate encouragement should be offered, with instruction on how to do it right as well as why (what will happen if you follow my instruction). It is important not to punish, which includes showing disapproval. Lack of attention can be addressed by setting standards and expectations from the start, not nagging and rewarding participation.

Getting positive things to happen. This can be achieved by making sure that instructions are clear, concise and positive. Again, it is essential to ensure effort is encouraged. Finally, results should not be demanded, encouraging effort is more beneficial. Coaches should not be sarcastic or degrading, and shouldn't let encouragement become irritating.

Mark/Level: 9/10 marks - Level 4

Examiner commentary

Broad knowledge base, beyond merely regurgitating the facts of the study. Set in cognitive context. Terminology shows good knowledge of study (eg bonehead plays). Details are precise and drawn directly from study. Application to question (how the study could be used) is explicit, accurate and relevant).

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

This is a good answer and meets the requirements of the question. Maybe more of the 'best features' could be added.

Question 9a

Explain how research by Smith et al (1979) could be used to improve the relationship skills of youth sports coaches.

[10]

Sample answer – Level 2

It is very important for coaches to form good relationships with their trainees. This way they can command respect and will be listened to with more authority and respect. Smith et al (1979) did a study where they looked at Little League Baseball teams and their coaches. They first went to a two hour lecture about coaching techniques, they also filled in records and gave verbal feedback. This was to keep their focus on the coaching. The CBAS coaching inventory was used to measure coaching behaviours, as well as players' perceptions of their coaches. Parents also gave some input. These were the experimental groups. The non-experimental groups had no coaching instructions, and just did what they would normally have done. There were 18 experimental groups and 13 control groups.

They found that the experimental groups were significantly more effective. Particularly in self esteem. Children with lower self esteem were more affected by encouragement, punishment and technical instruction. This tells us about how we can improve relationships in sport.

Mark/Level: 5/10 marks - Level 2

Examiner commentary

The candidate has a reasonably good knowledge of the study. The account is generally accurate and includes some detail. However, although it is in response to the appropriate area, it is not well applied to the question specifically.

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

By directly addressing how the research could be used to improve relationship skills of youth sports coaches, not simply providing an account of the study. More application of knowledge to the requirements of the question would therefore be beneficial.

Question 9a

Explain how research by Smith et al (1979) could be used to improve the relationship skills of youth sports coaches.

[10]

Sample answer – Level 1

It is important when coaching youth players to bear in mind they are going through adolescence. They will have increased levels of testosterone making them more competitive and aggressive. This can be used by coaches to improve coach effectiveness and therefore their relationships with the players. For example, to improve running speed, get them doing races, to improve a skill, as well as explaining, ask "who can do this the best".

During adolescence, youths do not like to be told exactly what to do, or to be made to look stupid in front of their friends. So the challenge for the coach is to instruct them on how to improve without making it sound like a criticism. "What to do" is better than "what you did wrong". For example, in a match, if someone keeps making a bad pass, don't tell them what they're doing wrong, but tell them what they should do.

Mark/Level: 2/10 marks - Level 1

Examiner commentary

There is no direct reference to Smith et al, in fact we may question whether this candidate has ever heard of the Smith et al study. This is a clear requirement of the question that has not been addressed. The answer is largely, if not wholly anecdotal and is further limited as it only refers to male adolescents. While the “*What to do*” is better than “*what you did wrong*” phrase is co-incidentally in keeping with the Smith et al study and therefore gets some credit.

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

The response should be about improving relationship skills in youth sports coaches, this should link to the Smith et al study and the implications from this piece of research.

Question 9b

Assess the individual and situational debate with regard to the performance of sports teams.

[15]

Sample answer – Level 4

The individual and situational debate is a consideration of whether dispositional characteristics/traits or those of the environment/situation are more significant in determining behaviour, in this case, the performance of sports teams.

The individual explanation may include arguments about genetics or personality. For example, team sports are generally more suited to extroverts, while individual sports are more for introverts. (Kroll and Crenshaw, 1970). Within teams, certain roles which are more explosive are for the extroverts whereas others which require high levels of personal discipline are for the introverts (Oxendine, 1980). Gadesdon (2001) has identified examples of fathers and sons and siblings in elite sports suggesting a genetic predisposition in becoming a successful sportsman and woman.

The other side of the debate suggests situational factors affect performance of sports teams. Tuckman’s research conducted in 1965 about how teams develop suggests the group situation and its development is a process which teams go through and the dynamics evolve through this. This is a direct example of how the team performs not simply how well the team performs as determined by the group situation. Whether a team plays at home or away seems to be a situation that affects performance. This was investigated by Schwartz and Barsky who found the negative effects on the away team accounted for poor performance, again suggesting the situation influences performance.

Much debate rages around team leadership - the Great Man theory (Stogdill, 1948) suggests leadership is dependent on inborn traits whereas Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) suggest it is the type of leaders, maybe influenced by the pervading political culture, which determines leadership and thus team success. Finally, Smith, Smoll and Curtis demonstrate how coaching can enhance the experience aspect of sport performance in youth teams, again suggesting the situation is paramount.

The resolution of this debate in relation to sports teams may lie in Moos’ proposal of an interactionist approach. It is likely that there are individual predispositions which make certain individuals more or less likely to be suited to different roles within teams. However, the fulfilment and success of these roles are determined by the situation in which the team finds itself, and arguably who its leader is. As the situation can lead to instances of individual types defying the odds which their predispositions would suggest, we have to conclude that the situational component is the strongest of the two arguments.

Mark/Level: 9/15 Marks – Level 4

Examiner commentary

The answer is presented in a succinct manner, however this does not without compromise the quality or depth of the response. Good knowledge of a range of studies is used to construct the debate. There is also an explicit *assessment* of the two sides of the debate, which finishes with a convincing conclusion.

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

The earlier points made are well supported by reference to research, but this analysis could be more thoroughly presented

Question 9b

Assess the individual and situational debate with regard to the performance of sports teams.

[15]

Sample answer – Level 2

The individual/situational debate considers personality factors and situational or environmental factors, in this instance in response to performance of sports teams. Personality factors support the individual side of the debate and it has been suggested that certain personalities are better in certain positions or for different sports. Also, physiological factors suggest we are born with different biology, such as higher adrenalin levels which can affect performance levels. On the other hand the situation can affect a team's performance, we often hear football managers blaming a slippery pitch or bad refereeing decisions for a poor performance. We also know from Smith et al (1979) with their work with Little League Baseball players that coaching can improve a youth team's performance, whatever their ability, so it cannot be all individual factors.

Other things can also affect performance, such as innate ability. Highly motivated people perform better when competing with others of similar ability. This makes them push themselves harder. However, if weaker performers are set against better ones, they are not a legitimate competitor and so cause a worse performance. Therefore it is important to play with people of similar ability.

Mark/Level: 5/6 marks - Level 2

Examiner commentary

The first paragraph is reasonable and responds to the requirements of the question, but the second paragraph shows a lack of knowledge and is superficial in what is already a rather brief response. There are a number of arguments presented, but they lack development. Furthermore, there is not much in the way of conclusions.

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

Clearer conclusions or arguments could be drawn which address issues and arguments to develop further analysis. More research evidence could also be presented to support arguments.

Question 9b

Assess the individual and situational debate with regard to the performance of sports teams.

[15]

Sample answer – Level 1

The individual/situational debate is about whether personality is inborn or whether it is from the environment. For example, you could inherit your personality through your genes, certain personality traits seem to run in the family.

On the other hand, people act as they do due to the situation they find themselves in. People can become aggressive if they are frustrated in some way - this is known as the frustration-aggression hypothesis. Or our personalities could develop through imitation of other people - this is known as the Social Learning theory.

We can see this in sports, where there are father and son sportsmen, such as Harry Redknapp and Jamie Redknapp or siblings such as Venus and Serena Williams. This seems to prove that sports ability runs in the family and therefore is inherited (genetics).

Mark/Level: 3/15 marks – Level 1

Examiner commentary

There is very little analysis beyond a basic interpretation. Broadly relevant concepts are presented, but they are not related to sports until the very end of the answer, where there is mention of sports ability, but not performance of sports teams, as the question requests.

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

More cogency/fluency is required. Analysis in the form of assessing individual and situational arguments to explain the performance of sports teams should be included. Furthermore, supporting research (theory or studies) should be added within the answer in order to strengthen the arguments given.

Question 9c

A team of young hockey players are ambitious to improve their performance. They have a new coach who spends a considerable amount of time socialising with the team. He is criticised by the team's parents who think the team should always be practising their hockey. However, in the next big game the team wins.

Discuss how a sports psychologist might apply their knowledge of sports coaching to explain the win to the team's parents.

[10]

Sample answer – Level 4

According to Smith et al (1979) players' attitudes, perception of their coach's behaviours and self esteem are key determinants of a successful team. The sports psychologist could therefore emphasise the importance of these qualities, in particular how a new coach is perceived by the team, as a reason why socialising with the players may enhance this perception, leading to a better response to coaching before and in preparation for the game. However, the research supports the view that the above qualities are improved but does not offer evidence of an improved win ratio, so this alone would not account for the win (this latter point is less likely to be shared with the parents!)

The inverted U hypothesis, originally proposed by Yerkes Dodson in 1908 shows that increasing arousal leads to increasing performance but only up to a certain, optimal point, after which further increases in arousal lead to increasing anxiety and so deterioration in performance. Individuals have their own zones of optimal functioning (Hanin, 1997). The sports psychologist could explain to parents that with a big game coming up there was a likelihood that players would be too intense and over-aroused for peak performance. Socialising would help ease the anxiety back to a lower level of arousal, closer to the optimal point of performance, and so a win in a big game becomes more likely. However, whether there was enough reduction or even over-relaxing is rather left to chance, so whether the optimal level is being aimed for is less certain.

Finally, the sports psychologist could explain the stages teams go through before they settle into higher functioning performances. First they form - the coming together; then there is the storming phase, when team members vie for status and standing amongst their teammates. As this stage resolves itself the team settles into how it functions as a norm; and finally it improves its performance. Socialising can help move the process along quicker. So moving from the storming phase, for example, where there is discord and disharmony in a team, to norming and performing increases the likelihood of a win because a coherent performing team is more likely to do well than a team in conflict. In reality, whether socialising would affect the performance of the hockey team is up for debate.

Mark/Level: 9/10 marks – Level 4

Examiner commentary

Good knowledge of research and psychological concepts. These are specifically and explicitly applied to the question, such as better perception of a new coach or response to the fact that it is a big game. The injunction is to 'discuss' how psychological knowledge might be used to explain the win to parents, so the fact that the sports psychologist's response is tempered with caution about each point is a direct response to this command.

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

The answer could be even more effective if the theory were to be more distilled to allow its practical application greater emphasis in the explanation to parents.

Question 9c

A team of young hockey players are ambitious to improve their performance. They have a new coach who spends a considerable amount of time socialising with the team. He is criticised by the team's parents who think the team should always be practising their hockey. However, in the next big game the team wins.

Discuss how a sports psychologist might apply their knowledge of sports coaching to explain the win to the team's parents.

[6]

Sample answer – Level 2

The research conducted by Smith, Smoll and Curtis identified players attitudes, perception of their coaches behaviours and self esteem as key determinants of a team's success. Although this would largely be achieved on the hockey field and at training, these can also be enhanced in a social environment.

We also know from research into arousal that over arousal can lead to anxiety. Arousal increases to an optimal level after which, if it continues to increase, it becomes anxiety and performance decreases. Therefore socialising can help players relax and so not get stressed and anxious.

A team develops through "forming, storming, norming and performing". Again, we can see that socialising can help this process. For example, if a team is in the storming stage, it will move onto the norming stage quicker if there is socialising.

In summary, winning is about being a team. Socialising can help different aspects of being a team: relationship with the coaches, maintaining arousal without letting it become anxiety, developing a team. By considering these, a coach can increase the chances of a win.

Mark/Level: 6 marks – Level 2

Examiner commentary

Research is well identified, but is of varying accuracy/detail. The answer has potential and is in the right area generally, but it is not explicit enough in addressing the scenario within the question specifically. There should be precise reference to hockey, a big game or winning.

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

More thorough knowledge of research would allow a more specific, accurate and directly relevant response to the precise demands of the question. The answer also needs to be applied much more to the question stem.

Question 9c

A team of young hockey players are ambitious to improve their performance. They have a new coach who spends a considerable amount of time socialising with the team. He is criticised by the team's parents who think the team should always be practising their hockey. However, in the next big game the team wins.

Discuss how a sports psychologist might apply their knowledge of sports coaching to explain the win to the team's parents.

[10]

Sample answer – Level 1

By befriending them they are more likely to trust him and listen to him. As he is the coach, he probably has more experience of the game of hockey than his young team. By socialising, he may be able to impart some of his knowledge, giving them the benefit of his wisdom, in a more relaxed atmosphere. That way, they are likely to be more receptive to his advice.

Also, he will have been trained in developing ability in youth hockey players. So by socialising with them he is spending more time with them and so has longer to share his knowledge and put across what he wants to say.

Finally, by building a friendship the team are more likely to want to win for their coach. He is building a sense of loyalty, an "all for one and one for all" mentality. Put all this together and you have a winning team, as was seen in their next big win!

Mark/Level: Zero Marks

Examiner commentary

This answer is wholly anecdotal; there is no application of psychological knowledge. The command word in the question is to 'Discuss' which clearly does not happen. There is nothing in the above answer that suggests the candidate has studied sports psychology, therefore no marks can be awarded.

How the answer could be improved/ model answer

In order to meet the requirements of the question the answer needs to refer to psychological knowledge or understanding and apply this to explaining the win to the parents.



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Telephone 01223 553998

Facsimile 01223 552627

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