AP Psychology

Common Mistakes · 常见错误

Psychology free-response points need the term defined AND applied to the scenario. A definition alone scores nothing; an application without the term scores nothing either. Write both, every time, in the order the prompt lists them. 心理学题必须“定义 + 结合情境应用”, 缺一不可。

Answering the prompt

Defining the term without applying it to the scenario. Both halves are required for one point.

Applying the term to a scenario of your own instead of the one given.

Answering the terms in a different order from the prompt. Graders read in order; an out-of-order answer risks being missed.

Writing an introduction or a conclusion. The FRQ is scored point by point and framing earns nothing.

Offering two possible answers for one point. If one is wrong, the point can be lost.

Using a term in a sentence that never shows understanding – ‘she used cognitive dissonance’ asserts rather than applies.

Concepts routinely confused

Confusing negative reinforcement with punishment. Negative reinforcement REMOVES something to INCREASE a behaviour; punishment decreases it.

Confusing classical with operant conditioning. Classical pairs stimuli and produces an involuntary response; operant uses consequences to shape voluntary behaviour.

Confusing the independent and dependent variable, or naming a confounding variable that the design already controls.

Treating correlation as causation – the single most examined reasoning error in the course.

Confusing sensation with perception: sensation is detection by receptors, perception is the brain’s interpretation.

Confusing the sympathetic with the parasympathetic branch. Sympathetic mobilises; parasympathetic restores.

Confusing reliability with validity. A consistent measure can be consistently wrong.

Attributing a behaviour to a brain structure without saying what that structure does – ‘the amygdala’ is not an explanation.

Research and ethics

Describing random sampling when random assignment is what permits a causal conclusion.

Naming an ethical principle without applying it: informed consent, protection from harm, confidentiality and debriefing each need to be tied to the study.

Interpreting statistical significance as ‘a large effect’. It means the result is unlikely under chance, not that it matters.