

Social Psychology and Personality

AP Psychology ■ Unit 4

AP Psychology



What we will cover

- 1 Explaining Behaviour: Attribution
- 2 Attitudes and Attitude Change
- 3 Social Situations
- 4 Personality: Psychodynamic and Humanistic
- 5 Personality: Social-Cognitive and Trait
- 6 Motivation

1

Explaining Behaviour: Attribution

Explaining Behaviour: Attribution

An explanation is either **dispositional** 内归因 (about the person's personality) or **situational** 外归因 (about the circumstances). People are not even-handed about which they choose:

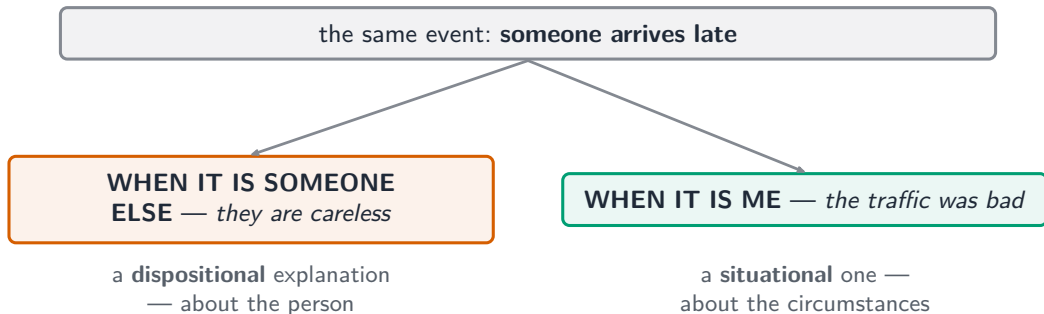
- The **fundamental attribution error** 基本归因错误 is over-using dispositional explanations for *other* people's behaviour.
- The **actor-observer bias** 行动者-观察者偏差 is explaining your own behaviour situationally while explaining others' dispositionally.
- The **self-serving bias** 自利偏差 credits success to yourself and blames failure on the situation.
- The **just-world phenomenon** 公正世界现象 is the belief that people get what they deserve.

Explaining Behaviour: Attribution, continued

A person's **explanatory style** 解释风格 can be **optimistic** 乐观的 or **pessimistic** 悲观的, and this shapes how they respond to setbacks.

Social comparison 社会比较 is judging yourself against others, either **upward** 向上比较 or **downward** 向下比较.

The attribution asymmetry



Nothing about the **behaviour** changed – only who is explaining it. That asymmetry is the error, and it is what a scenario question shows you

How we perceive other people

mere exposure effect 单纯曝光效应

repeated contact **increases liking**, with no other reason needed

self-fulfilling prophecy 自我实现预言

an expectation changes behaviour until it **makes itself true**

belief perseverance 信念固着

a belief survives even after the evidence for it is discredited

confirmation bias 确认偏误

we seek and notice evidence that **fits** what we already think

All four say the same thing from different angles: the perceiver is not a camera. What we expect shapes what we see and, through the prophecy, what actually happens.

2

Attitudes and Attitude Change

Attitudes and Attitude Change

A **stereotype** 刻板印象 is a generalised idea about a group; it reduces mental effort but can be inaccurate and harmful. **Prejudice** 偏见 is an attitude, and **discrimination** 歧视 is the behaviour. **Implicit attitudes** 内隐态度 are held without full awareness.

Confirmation bias 确认偏差 is seeking evidence that fits what you already believe.

Two routes to persuasion

the model

the **elaboration likelihood model** 精细加工可能性模型

central route 中心路径

uses the **strength of the argument** – works when the audience is motivated and able to think it through, and the change lasts

peripheral route 外周路径

uses **cues around** the argument – an attractive presenter, a celebrity, a catchy tune – and the change fades

foot-in-the-door 登门槛效应

a small request first makes a large one more likely to be granted

cognitive dissonance 认知失调

acting against your attitude is uncomfortable, so the **attitude moves** to match the act

Which route an advert uses tells you what it thinks of its audience – and predicts whether the effect will still be there next week.

3

Social Situations

Group pressure and authority

A class gives the wrong answer

Mei knows the answer is B. All her classmates say A. She says A aloud to avoid standing out, but still believes B privately.

An instruction from the teacher

The teacher tells Arun to stop discussing the question and hand in his paper. Arun follows the instruction even though he wants more time.

Which action matches a group, and which follows authority? What evidence tells you why Mei changes her public answer?

The reason for matching the group

Mei shows **conformity** 从众: she changes her public answer to match the group. Her wish to fit in supports **normative social influence** 规范性社会影响; her private belief has not changed.

Arun shows **obedience** 服从: he follows a directive from someone he accepts as an authority.

If Mei were unsure and accepted A because she thought the others knew better, that would support **informational social influence** 信息性社会影响.

Use the stated reason and source of pressure. The same visible answer can have different explanations, and more than one process can operate.

A change in the social situation

One classmate now says B

Mei hears another student disagree with the majority. Predict how this may change the pressure to say A. Explain the relevant change in the situation.

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One classmate now says B

Mei hears another student disagree with the majority. Predict how this may change the pressure to say A. Explain the relevant change in the situation.

The group is no longer unanimous. An ally can reduce normative pressure, so Mei may be more willing to give B. This is a prediction about likelihood, not a guarantee of her choice.

Social norms 社会规范 set expectations. Group size, ambiguity and unanimity can matter for conformity; perceived authority and circumstances can matter for obedience.

One changed factor does not establish a universal ranking of all influences. A dissenter is not always the strongest factor in every setting.

Conformity and obedience

CONFORMITY — matching a group

rises with group size, up to a point

rises when the group is unanimous

falls sharply with one ally who dissents

rises when the answer is ambiguous

OBEDIENCE — following an authority

rises with the authority's legitimacy

rises with distance from the consequence

falls when someone else refuses first

falls when responsibility is made personal

Compare the source of pressure and the changed circumstance. These factors affect likelihood; they do not guarantee a response or establish one universal strongest factor.

Compliance, and how requests are engineered

Foot-in-the-door

A small request first makes the larger one likelier – consistency with the identity the first agreement created.

Door-in-the-face

Door-in-the-face: an unreasonable request refused, then the real one, which now looks like a concession worth reciprocating.

Norms do the work

Both exploit **social norms** – consistency and reciprocity – rather than any argument about the request itself.

Name the technique *and* the norm it exploits. The norm is the explanation; the technique is only the label.

Helping, and why a crowd stops it

altruism 利他行为

selfless helping, at a cost to the helper

prosocial behavior 亲社会行为

the broader category – helping that *may* also benefit the helper

bystander effect 旁观者效应

the **more** people present, the **less** likely any one of them helps

diffusion of responsibility 责任分散

the mechanism: each bystander assumes someone else will act

the counter

naming one person directly (“you, in the red coat”) removes the diffusion and help arrives

The bystander effect is about **number**, not indifference. That is the distinction the free-response question wants drawn.

What a group does to individual behaviour

social facilitation 社会助长

an audience **improves** performance on simple or well-practised tasks – and **harms** it on difficult or new ones

social loafing 社会惰化

individual effort falls when it cannot be identified within a group's output

deindividuation 去个体化

anonymity in a crowd loosens self-restraint

group polarisation 群体极化

discussion pushes a group toward a **more extreme** version of its initial leaning

groupthink 群体思维

the desire for agreement suppresses dissent and produces a worse decision

Individualism 个人主义 and **collectivism** 集体主义 modulate every one of these, and **multi-culturalism** 多元文化主义 describes societies holding several such orientations at once.

Audience effects: evidence for an argument

2025 Evidence-Based Question, Source 1

Researchers studied 45 male undergraduate students. An attentive audience watched some participants; others completed tasks alone. Participants completed their own-shoe tasks faster with an audience, but took longer on new clothing tasks with an audience.

Develop a qualified claim about whether others improve performance. Use the task comparison as evidence, then explain it with social facilitation.

This practises Part A and B. A full EBQ also requires evidence from a different source and a different concept for Part C.

Evidence and psychological reasoning

Claim: An audience can improve performance on well-learned tasks while impairing performance on difficult, unfamiliar tasks.

Evidence: In Source 1, participants completed their own-shoe tasks faster with an attentive audience, but took longer on the unfamiliar clothing tasks than when alone (Source 1).

Reasoning: Social facilitation 社会助长 predicts this difference by task difficulty and familiarity. The opposite changes support a conditional claim rather than “others always help.”

This is an original worked response. The official B(ii) criterion distinguishes explaining the evidence from applying a course concept to explain how it supports the claim.

4

Personality: Psychodynamic and Humanistic

Four accounts of where personality comes from

The **psychodynamic** 精神动力学 approach holds that **unconscious** 无意识 processes drive personality.

Ego defense mechanisms 自我防御机制 protect the person from anxiety, and the examinable set is **denial** 否认, **displacement** 转移, **projection** 投射, **rationalization** 合理化, **reaction formation** 反向形成,...

Four approaches to personality

personality 人格

a person's characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling and behaving

psychodynamic 心理动力学

unconscious conflicts and early experience – historically important, weak on evidence

humanistic 人本主义

growth toward **self-actualisation** 自我实现, given **unconditional positive regard**

social-cognitive 社会认知

behaviour from the **interaction** of person and situation – **reciprocal determinism** 交互决定论, **self-efficacy** 自我效能

trait 特质

the **Big Five**: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, **agreeableness** 宜人性, neuroticism

All four are examinable and each answers a different question. The trait approach *describes*; the other three try to *explain*.

Personality, motivation, and the group

Trait theories

Trait theories describe rather than explain: the Big Five, of which **openness to experience** is the one most tied to creativity.

Sensation-seeking

Sensation-seeking theory explains why some people need far more stimulation for the same arousal – and take the risks that follow.

Group polarization

Group polarization: discussion among like-minded people moves the group's average view *further* in that direction.

Reducing conflict

Superordinate goals – a task neither group can achieve alone – cut hostility where contact alone does not.

The **false consensus effect** makes us overestimate how many people agree with us; **social norms** then look stronger than they are.

Four accounts of where personality comes from, in detail

	Psycho-dynamic	Humanistic	Social-cognitive	Trait
what drives it	unconscious conflict	drive to grow	person, behaviour, environment interact	enduring traits
key ideas	defense mechanisms: repression, projection	unconditional positive regard, self-actualization	reciprocal determinism, self-efficacy, locus of control	the Big Five: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism
how assessed	projective tests (weak reliability)	interviews, self-report	observation in context	self-report inventories

all four describe the SAME person from different angles

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Personality: Psychodynamic and Humanistic

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It emphasises **unconditional positive regard** 无条件积极关注 and **self-actualization** 自我实现 – becoming the fullest version of oneself.

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Personality: Social-Cognitive and Trait

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The **social-cognitive** 社会认知 approach explains personality through **reciprocal determinism** 交互决定论: the person, their behaviour, and the environment each influence the other two.

Self-efficacy 自我效能感 – belief in one's own ability to succeed at a task – is central, as is **locus of control** 控制点, which is **internal** 内控 or **external** 外控.

6

Motivation

Physical need, stimulation and reward

Three reasons for acting

After a long run, Jia drinks water because she is thirsty. Later, she chooses a new puzzle because her usual game feels dull. She also completes a school task to earn a promised reward.

Match each reason to drive reduction, arousal or incentives. Explain the need, stimulation or reward in the case rather than only giving a label.

Different theories explain different motives

Drive-reduction theory 驱力减少理论: drinking reduces a physical need and helps restore **homeostasis** 内稳态. It does not explain every reason for drinking.

Arousal theory 唤醒理论: choosing a new puzzle can increase stimulation when a familiar task feels dull. People seek a suitable level, not the greatest possible arousal.

Incentive theory 诱因理论: the promised reward attracts Jia toward the task.

Extrinsic motivation 外在动机 comes from that outside outcome; **intrinsic motivation** 内在动机 would be doing the puzzle for its own interest or enjoyment.

The course's account of **self-determination theory** 自我决定理论 distinguishes intrinsic and extrinsic motives. One action can have both.

Arousal and task difficulty

Familiar routine or new skill?

A learner performs a familiar routine before an audience, then tries a difficult new routine. Would raising arousal necessarily improve both performances? Explain your prediction.

Task difficulty changes the arousal prediction

The **Yerkes-Dodson law** 耶克斯-多德森定律 links performance to arousal. Very low arousal may leave a learner disengaged; excessive arousal may interfere with performance.

Task difficulty matters: a difficult or unfamiliar task generally needs a lower optimal level than an easy, well-learned task. The same arousal can therefore have different consequences.

This is a qualified prediction. An audience does not guarantee success, and “moderate is always best” loses the task distinction.

Choices that create motivational conflict

Identify the attractive and unattractive outcomes

A: You can attend either of two events you would enjoy, but they happen at the same time.

B: You must either do an unpleasant chore now or miss an outing later.

C: One performance offers an exciting opportunity, but you also fear embarrassment on stage.

Which case has two attractive options, two unattractive options, or one option with both attraction and cost?

The structure of the choice

In **Lewin's motivational conflicts** 勒温的动机冲突理论, the structure of the choice determines the type.

A is **approach-approach** 双趋冲突: both events are attractive, and choosing one means giving up the other.

B is **avoidance-avoidance** 双避冲突: both available outcomes are unattractive.

C is **approach-avoidance** 趋避冲突: the same performance has attractive and unattractive features. It is not a choice between two separate bad options.

Identify the options and their value to this person. Feeling worried alone does not identify the conflict type.

An instinct is more than an unlearned response

Instincts 本能 are innate, typically fixed patterns triggered by particular stimuli in many non-human animals.

Two claims to assess

“A bird’s fixed species-typical action pattern is instinctive.”

“A student chooses a subject without anyone teaching that exact choice, so the choice must be an instinct.”

The second claim does not establish a fixed, stimulus-triggered pattern. A choice may reflect experience, beliefs or incentives even when nobody directly taught it.

The course states that humans do not seem to show instinctual patterns in this sense. This does not mean humans have no innate capacities or reflexes.

Motivation, continued

Eating shows physical and mental processes interacting.

Ghrelin and **leptin**, regulated by the hypothalamus, control hunger and fullness, while external factors – the sight of food, the time of day, a shared meal – change how much people eat.

7

Emotion

Emotion

Some facial expressions are recognised across cultures, but **display rules** 表达规则 – a culture's norms for showing emotion – and the events that trigger emotion both vary.

Exam tips

- **Fundamental attribution error** applies to explaining *others*. For your own behaviour, distinguish actor-observer explanations from self-serving explanations of success or failure.
- **Social facilitation** improves *simple* tasks and harms difficult ones. Say which kind of task the scenario describes.
- Separate **conformity** (matching a group) from **obedience** (following an authority).
- For **cognitive dissonance**, name the conflict and say which side changed – usually the attitude, because the behaviour already happened.
- Learn the **Big Five** as a set; questions often ask you to place a described person on one named trait.
- For emotion, compare succession, simultaneous responses and cognitive labelling. The specific historical theory names are outside the exam scope.

A racing heart in different situations

The role of interpretation

Sam notices a racing heart while entering a room. In one account, Sam interprets the situation as dangerous and experiences fear. In another, Sam interprets it as an exciting celebration and experiences excitement.

What does this account add to physiological arousal? How does it differ from an account in which bodily arousal and conscious emotion occur simultaneously?

The cases illustrate a proposed explanation. They are not experimental evidence proving that explanation.

Physiological experience and cognitive experience

A **cognitive label** 认知标签 supplies an interpretation of arousal in context. In the proposed account, similar bodily arousal can accompany different emotions because the interpretation differs.

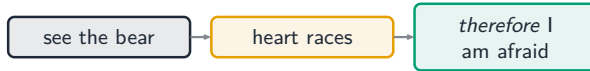
A successive account proposes that bodily changes precede the experience of emotion. A simultaneous account proposes that arousal and conscious emotion occur together. Neither description alone states that a contextual label is required.

Emotion 情绪, or **affect** 情感, reflects internal and external influences. Identify what a particular account proposes about the relationship between body and cognition.

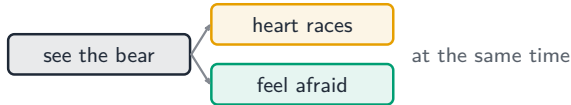
These mechanisms are required course content. Specific historical theory names are outside the AP Psychology Exam scope.

Optional historical labels for emotion mechanisms

JAMES-LANGE



CANNON-BARD



SCHACHTER-SINGER



Optional historical labels: the exam assesses relationships between physiological experience, cognitive experience and labelling, rather than recall of these names.

8

Recap

Unit 4 – key takeaways

1

Attribution

FAE: overusing traits to explain others' behaviour

2

Social

conformity matches a group;
obedience follows authority

3

Dissonance

name the conflict; the attitude usually changes

4

Emotion

order: body / together /
arousal+label

Check yourself

- 1 Overlooking known road hazards and blaming a stranger's crash only on carelessness: which bias?
- 2 Matching a group's wrong answer: conformity or obedience?
- 3 What distinguishes a cognitive-label account of emotion?
- 4 Name one Big Five trait.

Answers: fundamental attribution error ▪ conformity ▪ arousal plus interpretation of context
▪ e.g. conscientiousness