

Developmental psychology

GRE Subject Test · GRE Psychology

Scope and prerequisites

GRE Psychology topic 4 (IV). Read DV.1 for developmental theories and their evidence. The practice tasks below are original, not official ETS questions.

Concepts and method

cohort : People sharing a birth period or historical experience. **attrition** : Loss of participants during a study.

Development covers the lifespan and multiple domains, not just childhood milestones. Cross-sectional studies compare ages at one time; longitudinal studies follow people over time.

Cohort effects can confound age comparisons. Longitudinal studies face attrition and repeated-testing effects.

Theories offer different accounts of change. Apply their specific mechanisms rather than treating a stage label as an explanation.

Development can change knowledge, strategy and social support at different rates. Piaget's account emphasizes changes in reasoning; Vygotsky's account emphasizes learning supported by social interaction. Attachment concerns a relationship and patterns of security, not a permanent label inferred from one separation. Age averages do not establish a deadline for each child. Compare repeated observations, task demands and cultural context before deciding what changed. See DV.1 for theories and methods.

Worked reasoning

Comparing 20-year-olds and 70-year-olds on computer use cannot isolate age: they had different exposure opportunities. Following one group helps examine change but may lose participants unevenly, creating attrition bias.

Children solve a sorting task with an adult's hints but not alone. How could a socio-cultural explanation account for the difference?

The hints provide scaffolding within a range where supported performance exceeds independent performance. They may direct attention or model a useful strategy. Record the actual hint and later test without it; success with help does not yet establish independent mastery or identify a universal stage.

Piaget's proposed sequence: examples

1 Sensorimotor Roughly birth to 2 years Action and perception Object permanence	2 Preoperational Roughly 2 to 7 years Symbols and pretend play Focus on one feature
3 Concrete operations Roughly 7 to 11/12 years Conservation Reversibility	4 Formal operations From about 11/12 years Hypotheses Controlled comparisons

Approximate ages; one task does not establish a complete profile.

Piaget defined each stage by how the child reasons, with approximate ages

Independent transfer

A study compares adolescents and adults once, then calls the difference a developmental change. Give the design, a competing explanation and a complementary design with its limitation.

Attempt independently, then use the matching skill sheet solution.

Review and source limits

Avoid this error: Average developmental patterns do not imply identical timing or outcomes for every person.