

# Improve your A02 - Comparing Theories and Approaches

- **Problem:** you fail to gain marks in the exam because when asked to 'refer to another theory/approach' you simply describe a different one without making comparisons or contrasts.
- **Solution:** structure your comparisons around key debates and research methods. Use these as the basis for pointing out similarities and differences between theories and approaches.

## Development exercise

Below are some pairs of theories/approaches. Some of them have suggested bases for comparisons, others do not. You need to either decide whether, on the basis given, the two theories/approaches are similar or different and then:

1. Write a sentence explaining how the theories/approaches are similar /different.
2. Add a further sentence or two explaining the similarity or difference by pointing out the features of each theory/approach that relate to the difference/similarity you are discussing.
3. Write a further sentence or two explaining a consequence or implication of the similarity/difference.
4. If appropriate, identify a difference/similarity that relates to the one you have discussed but which contrasts with it (i.e. a similarity within a difference or a difference within a similarity).

*The order of 3 and 4 can be reversed if it gives a more coherent structure to your point.*

## Theories and approaches (they may be similar or different depending on the criterion)

- Behaviourist and biological approaches – use of animals in research.
- Behaviourist and biological approaches – nature/nurture debate.
- Social learning and cognitive theories of gender development – nature nurture debate.
- Humanistic and Psychodynamic approaches – idiographic/nomothetic approach.
- Humanistic and cognitive approaches – freedom/determinism debate.
- Social learning and cognitive approaches – research methods.
- Biological and cognitive theories of gender development.
- Psychodynamic and cognitive theories of gender development.
- Psychodynamic and biological theories of gender development.
- Humanistic and biological approaches.

Here's an example so you can see how it might be done. The numbers show where I've done each thing. I've put important phrases in **bold**. These are phrases that signal to the examiner *why* you're including things

*One similarity between the biological and behaviourist approaches is that they both use non-human animals in their research. (1) **For example**, behaviourists used rats in Skinner boxes to investigate operant conditioning and biopsychologists did neurosurgical studies on many species to discover how the nervous system works. (2) The approaches use animal subjects **in different ways, however**. Behaviourists focus on how the animal responds to changes in its external environment **whereas** biopsychologists focus on how it responds to changes in its internal structure. (4) In either case **a consequence of this** is that critics have attacked both approaches on ethical grounds and because the findings they produce may not generalise to humans. (3)*